PREFACE.

When a distinct Moral presides over the composition of a work of fiction, there is great danger of its so shaping the story to suit a purpose, that human nature is falsified by being coerced within the sharply defined limits of some small dogma.

So conscious of this did I become in the progress of my story, that I was forced to abandon my original intention, in favor of a more natural evolution of incident and character; accordingly, the Moral has been left to shift for itself. It was a choice between truth of passion and character, on the one hand, and on the other, didactic clearness. I could not hesitate in choosing the former.

And yet, as Hegel truly says, "in every work of Art there is a Moral; but it depends on him who draws it." If, therefore, the reader insists upon a Moral, he may draw one from the passions here exhibited; and the value of it will depend upon his own sagacity.

From Life itself I draw one great moral, which I may be permitted to say is illustrated in various ways by the present work; and it is this:—

Strength of Will is the quality most needing cultivation in mankind. Will is the central force which gives strength and greatness to character. We over-estimate the value of Talent, because it dazzles us; and we are apt to underrate the importance of Will, because its works are less shining. Talent gracefully adorns life; but it is Will which carries us victoriously through the struggle. Intellect is the torch which lights us on our way; Will, the strong arm which rough hews the path for us. The clever, weak man sees all the obstacles on his path; the very torch he carries, being brighter than that of most men, enables him, perhaps, to see that the path before him may be the directest, the best—yet it also enables him to see the crooked turnings by which he may, as he fancies, reach the goal without encountering difficulties. If, indeed, Intellect were a sun, instead of a torch—if it irradiated every corner and crevice—then would man see how, in spite of every obstacle, the direct path was the only safe one, and he would cut his way through

by manful labor. But constituted as we are, it is the clever weak men who stumble most—the strong men who are most virtuous and happy. In this world, there can not be virtue without strong Will; the weak "know the right, and yet the wrong pursue."

No one, I suppose, will accuse me of deifying Obstinacy, or even mere brute Will; nor of depreciating Intellect. But we have had too many dithyrambs in honor of mere Intelligence; and the older I grow, the clearer I see that Intellect is *not* the highest faculty in man, although the most brilliant. Knowledge, after all is not the greatest thing in life: it is not the "be-all and the end-all here." Life is not Science. The light of intellect is truly a precious light; but its aim and end is simply to shine. The moral nature of man is more sacred in my eyes than his intellectual nature. I know they can not be divorced—that without intelligence we should be brutes—but it is the tendency of our gaping, wondering dispositions to give pre-eminence to those faculties which most astonish us. Strength of character seldom, if ever, astonishes; goodness, lovingness, and quiet self-sacrifice, are worth all the talents in the world.

ROSE, BLANCHE, AND VIOLET.

PROLOGUE.

1835.

It was a sultry day in July, and the sun was pouring down from a cloudless heaven intense rays upon the High-street of ——. The heat made the place a desert; more indeed of a desert than even High-streets of country towns usually are. There was a burned odor in the atmosphere, arising from the scorched pavement, and rayed forth from the garish brick houses. Silence and noon-day heat reigned over the scene. The deep stillness was brought out into stronger relief by the occasional bark of a dog, or rumbling of a solitary cart.

A few human beings dotted the street, at wide intervals. There was a groom standing at the stable-yard entrance of the Royal George, indolently chewing a blade of grass. The clergyman's wife, hot, dusty, and demure, was shopping. A farmer had just dismounted from a robust white cob, which he left standing at the door of a dismal red-brick house, on the wire blinds of which was painted the word—Bank. Higher up, three ragged urchins were plotting mischief, or arranging some game. A proud young mother was dandling her infant at a shop door, as if desirous that the whole street should be aware of the important fact of her maternity—to be sure, there never was such a beautiful baby before! In the window of that shop—it was a grocer's—a large black cat was luxuriously sleeping on a bed of moist sugar, sunning herself there, too lazy even to disturb the flies which crowded to the spot.

To one who, a stranger to the place, merely cast his eyes down that street, nothing could appear more lifeless—more devoid of all human interest—more uncheckered by the vicissitudes of passion. It had the calm of the desert, without the grandeur. In such a place the current of life would seem monotonously placid; existence itself scarcely better than vegetation. It is not so, however. To those who inhabited the place, it was known that beneath the stillness a stratum of boiling lava was ever ready to burst forth. Every house was really the theater of some sad comedy, or of some grotesque tragedy. The shop, which to an unfamiliar eye, was but the depository of retail goods, with John Smith as the retailer, was, to an inhabitant, the well-known scene of some humble heroism, or ridiculous pretension. John Smith, smirking behind his counter, is not simply an instrument of commerce; he is a husband, a father, and a citizen; he has his follies, his passions, his hopes, and his opinions; he is the object of unreckoned scandals.

To the eye of the stranger who now leisurely paced the street, the town was dull and lifeless, because it had not the incessant noise of a capital, and because he knew nothing of the dramas which were being enacted within its walls. Yet even he was soon to learn that sorrow, "not loud but deep," was weeping ineffectually over a tragedy which touched him nearly.

He was a man of about thirty years of age, with the unmistakable look of a gentleman, and, to judge from his mustaches and erect bearing, an officer in the army. As he passed her, the proud young mother ceased for a moment to think only of her child, and followed with admiring eyes his retreating form. The echo of his sharp, decisive tread rang through the silent street; and soon he disappeared, turning up toward a large house which fronted the sea.

He knocked at the door, and with an unconscious coquetry smoothed his dark mustache while waiting. The door was opened by a gray-haired butler.

"How d'ye do, Wilson? Are they at home—eh! what's this! you in mourning?"

"Yes, sir. What! don't you know, sir?"

"Good God! what has happened? Is Mrs. Vyner—?"

"Yes, sir, yes," replied the butler, shaking his head, sorrowfully. "It has been a dreadful blow, sir, to master, and to the young ladies. She was buried Monday week."

The stranger was almost stupefied by this sudden shock.

"Dead!" he exclaimed; "dead! Good God!—So young, so young.—Dead!—So beautiful and good.—Dead!"

"Ah, sir, master will never get over it. He does take on so. I never saw any one, never; and the young ladies—"

"Dead!"

"Will you please to walk up, sir? Master would like to see you."

"No, no, no!"

"It will comfort him; indeed, sir, it will. He likes to talk to any one, sir, about the party that's gone."

The tears came into the old man's eyes as he thus alluded to his lost mistress, and the stranger was too much affected to notice the singular language in which the butler spoke of "the party."

After a few moments' consideration, the stranger walked up into the drawing-room, while the servant went to inform Mr. Vyner of the visit. Left to himself, and to the undis-

turbed indulgence of those feelings of solemn sadness by which we are always affected at the sudden death of those we know, especially of the young—shaking us as it does in the midst of our own security, and bringing terribly home the conviction of that fact which health and confidence keep in a dim obscurity, that "in the midst of life we are in death"—the stranger, whom we shall now name as Captain Heath, walked up to a miniature of the deceased, and gazed upon it in melancholy curiosity.

Captain Heath had lost a dear friend in Mrs. Vyner, with whom he had been a great favorite. To his credit, be it said, that, although the handsome wife of a man much older than herself, he had never for an instant misinterpreted her kindness toward him; and this, too, although he was an officer in the hussars. Theirs was truly and strictly a friendship between man and woman, as pure as it was firm; founded upon mutual esteem and sympathy. Some malicious whispers were, indeed, from time to time, ventured on—for who can entirely escape them?—but they never gained much credence. Mrs. Vyner's whole life was an answer to calumny.

Meredith Vyner, of Wytton Hall, Devonshire, was the kindest if not the most fascinating of husbands. A book-worm, and pedant, he had the follies of his tribe, and was as open to ridicule as the worst of them; but, with all his foibles, he was a kind, gentle, weak, indolent creature, who made many friends, and, what is more, retained them.

There was something remarkable though not engaging in his appearance. He looked like a dirty bishop. In his pale, puffy face there was an ecclesiastical mildness, which assorted well with a large forehead and weak chin, though it brought into stronger contrast the pugnacity of a short, blunt nose, the nostrils of which were somewhat elevated and garnished with long black hairs. A physiognomist would at once have pronounced him obstinate, but weak; loud in the assertion of his intentions, vacillating in their execution. His large person was curiously encased in invariable black; a tail-coat with enormous skirts, in which were pockets capacious enough to contain a stout volume; the waistcoat of black silk, liberally sprinkled with grains of snuff, reached below the waist, and almost concealed the watch-chain and its indefinite number of gold seals which dangled from the fob; of his legs he was as proud as men usually are who have an ungraceful development of calf; and hence, perhaps, the reason of his adhering to the black tights of our fathers. Shoes, large, square, and roomy, with broad silver buckles, completed his invariable and somewhat anachronical attire.

People laughed at Meredith Vyner for his dirty nails and his love of Horace (whom he was always quoting, without regard to the probability of his hearers understanding Latin—for the practice seemed involuntary); but they respected him for his integrity and goodness, and for his great, though ill-assorted, erudition. In a word, he was laughed at, but there was no malice in the laughter.

As Captain Heath stood gazing on the miniature of his lost friend, a heavy hand was placed upon his shoulder; and on turning round he beheld Meredith Vyner, on whose large, pale face sorrow had deepened the lines: his eyes were bloodshot and swollen with crying. In silence, they pressed each other's hands for some moments, both unable to speak. At last, in a trembling voice, Vyner said, "Gone, gone! She's gone from us."

Heath responded by a fervent pressure of the hand.

"Only three weeks ill," continued the wretched widower; "and so unexpected!"

"She died without pain," he added, after a pause; "sweetly resigned. She is in heaven now. I shall follow her soon: I feel I shall. I can not survive her loss."

"Do not forget your children."

"I do not; I will not. Is not one of them *her* child? I will struggle for its sake. So young to be cut off!"

There was another pause, in which each pursued the train of his sad thoughts. The hot air puffed through the blinds of the darkened room, and the muffled sounds of distant waves breaking upon the shore were faintly heard.

"Come with me," said Vyner, rising.

He led the captain into the bed-room.

"There she lay," he said, pointing to the bed· "you see the mark of the coffin on the coverlet! I would not have it disturbed. It is the last trace she left."

The tears rolled down his cheek as he gazed upon this frightful memento.

"In this room I sat up a whole night when they laid her in the coffin, and all night as I gazed upon those loved features, placid in their eternal repose, I was constantly fancying that she breathed, and that her bosom heaved again with life. Alas! it was but the mockery of my love. She remained cold to my kiss—insensible to the tenderness which watched over her. Yet I *could* not leave her. It was foolish, perhaps, but it was all that remained to me. To gaze upon her was painful, yet there was pleasure in that pain. The face which had smiled such sunshine on me, which had so often looked up to mine in love, that face was now cold, lifeless—but it was *hers*, and I could not leave it. My poor, poor girl!"

His sobs interrupted him. Captain Heath had no disposition to check a grief which would evidently wear itself away much more rapidly by thus dwelling on the subject, than by any effort to drive it from the mind. To say the truth, Heath was himself too much moved to speak. The long, sharply-defined trace of the coffin on the coverlet was to him more terrible than the sight of the corpse could have been; it was so painfully suggestive.

"The second night," continued Vyner, "they prevailed on me to go to bed; but I could not sleep. No sooner did I drop into an uneasy doze, than some horrible dream aroused me. My waking thoughts were worse. I was continually fancying the rats would—would—ugh! At last, I got up and went into the room. Who should be there, but Violet! The dear child was in her night dress, praying by the side of the bed! She did not move when I came in. I knelt down with her. We both offered up our feeble prayers to Him who had been pleased

to take her from us. We prayed together, we wept together. We kissed gently the pale, rigid face, and then the dear child suffered me to lead her away without a word. It was only then that I suspected the depth of Violet's grief. She had not cried so much as Rose and Blanche. I thought she was too young to feel the loss. But from that moment I understood the strange light which plays in her eyes when she speaks of her mother."

He stooped over the bed and kissed it; and then, quite overcome, he threw himself upon a chair and buried his face in his hands. The ceaseless wash of the distant waves was now distinctly heard, and it gave a deeper melancholy to the scene. Captain Heath's feelings were so wound up, that the room was becoming insupportable to him, and desirous of shaking off these impressions, he endeavored to console his friend.

"I ought to be more firm," said Vyner, rising, "but I can not help it. I am not ashamed of these tears—

> Quis desiderio sit pudor aut modus
> Tam cari capitis?

But I ought not to distress others by them."

He led the way down stairs, and, as the children were out, made Heath promise to return to dinner; "it would help to make them all more cheerful."

Captain Heath departed somewhat shocked at the pedantry which in such a moment could think of Horace; and by that very pedantry he was awakened to a sense of the ludicrous figure which sorrow had made of Vyner.

We are so constituted that, while scarcely any thing disturbs our hilarity, the least incongruity which seems to lessen the earnestness of grief, chills our sympathy at once. Vyner's quotation introduced into the mind of his friend an undefined suspicion of the sincerity of that grief which could admit of such incongruity. But the suspicion was unjust. It was not pedantry which dictated that quotation. Pedantry is the pride and ostentation of learning, and at that moment Vyner was assuredly not thinking of displaying an acquantance with the Latin poet. He was simply obeying a habit; he gave utterance to a sentence which his too faithful memory presented.

Captain Heath walked on the sands musing. He had not gone far before his eye was caught by the appearance of two girls in deep mourning; a second glance assured him they were Vyner's daughters. Walking rapidly toward them, he was received with affectionate interest.

Quickly recovering from the depression which the sight of him at first awakened, they began, with the happy volatility of childhood, to ask him all sorts of questions.

"But where is my little Violet?" asked the captain.

"Oh! she's sitting on the ledge of a rock yonder, listening to the sea," said Blanche.

"Yes," added Rose, "it is very extraordinary—she says the sea has voices in it which speak to her. She can not tell us what it says, but it makes her happy. But she cries a great deal, and that doesn't look like happiness, does it, Captain Heath?"

"No, Rosebud, not very. But let me go to her."

"Yes, do: come along."

The three moved on together, and presently came to the rock, on a ledge of which a little girl was lounging. Her hat was off, and her long dark brown hair was scattered over her shoulders by the wind. Her face was toward the horizon, and she seemed intently watching.

From the two little traits of her drawn by her father and her sisters, Captain Heath, who had not seen her since she was a merry little thing of seven, anticipated a sickly, precocious child, in whom reading or conversation had engendered some of that spiritual exaltation which is mostly three parts affectation to one part disease. He was agreeably disappointed. She had not noticed their arrival, but on being spoken to, embraced the captain with warmth, and received him in a perfectly natural manner.

To set his doubts at rest, he said—

"Well, Violet, has the sea been eloquent today, or is it too calm?"

She looked up at him, then at her sisters, and colored. "I see they have been making fun of me," she said; "but that's not fair. I love to sit by the sea because—" she hesitated, "mamma loved it. It isn't foolish of me, is it, Captain Heath?"

"No, my dear, not at all—not at all."

"Oh, Captain Heath!" exclaimed Rose, "you said, just now, it was."

He pinched her little cheek playfully, and was about to reply, when Blanche said—

"Look, there is Mary Hardcastle walking with Mrs. Henley. Let us go and speak to them. I will introduce you, Captain Heath; she's very pretty."

"Another time," replied he; "they seem to be talking very earnestly together."

"That they are."

"I hate Mary Hardcastle," said Violet.

"Why?"

"I don't know, but I hate her."

"Silly child!" said Rose; "she's always saying kind things to you."

"And always doing unkind ones," rejoined Violet, sharply.

"Hate is a strong word, Violet," said Blanche.

"Not stronger than I want," replied the high-spirited little girl.

All this while the captain was following with his eyes the retreating form of the said Mary Hardcastle.

Let us follow also.

"It is hopeless for me to expect my guardian will allow him to come," said that young lady, with great emphasis, to her companion; "you know how much he dislikes Marmaduke. So, unless you consent—you will, won't you?"

"I can not resist you, Mary. But how is this interview to be arranged?"

"It *is* arranged. I was so *sure* of your goodness, I knew you would not let him leave England without seeing me once more, to say farewell; so I told him to call on you this very afternoon, because I was to spend the day with you. Thus, you see, it will all happen in the most natural manner."

Mrs. Henley smiled, shook her forefinger at her young friend, so they walked on, both satisfied.

Having gained this point, it soon occurred to Mary, that Marmaduke might be asked to dine and spend the evening; but as this would expose Mrs. Henley to the chance of some one dropping in, and she was very averse to be supposed to favor these clandestine meetings, a steady refusal was given. Mary inwardly resolved that she would have a farewell meeting with her lover, and alone; but said nothing more on the subject. To have a lover about to sail for Brazil, and to part with him coldly before others, was an idea no young girl could entertain, and least of all Mary Hardcastle. She was too well read in romance to think of such a thing.

It does not occur to every girl, in our unromantic days, to have a stern guardian who dislikes her lover, and forbids him the house. Mary, therefore, might consider herself as greatly favored by misfortune; her misery was as perfectly select as even her wish could frame, and the great, the thrilling climax—the parting—was at hand. That it should be moonlight was a matter of course—moonlight on the seashore.

Mary Hardcastle was just nineteen. There was something wonderfully attractive about her, though it puzzled you to say wherein lay the precise attraction. Very diminutive, and slightly humpbacked, she had somewhat the air of a sprite—so tiny, so agile, so fragile, and cunning did she appear; and this appearance was further aided by the amazing luxuriance of her golden hair, which hung in curls, drooping to her waist. The mixture of deformity and grace in her figure was almost unearthly. She had a skin of exquisite texture and whiteness, and the blood came and went in her face with the most charming mobility. All her features were alive, and all had their peculiar character. The great defects of her face were the thinness of her lips, and the cat-like cruelty sometimes visible in her small, gray eyes. I find it impossible to convey in words the effect of her personal charms. The impression was so mixed up of the graceful and diabolic, of the attractive and repulsive, that I know of no better description of her than is given in Marmaduke's favorite names for her; he called her his "fascinating panther," and his "tiger-eyed sylph."

She had completely enslaved Marmaduke Ashley. With the blood of the tropics in his veins, he had much of the instinct of the savage, and as when a boy he had felt a peculiar passion for snakes and tigers, so in his manhood were there certain fibers which the implacable eyes of Mary Hardcastle made vibrate with a delight no other woman had roused. He was then only twenty-four, and in all the credulity of youth.

Every thing transpired according to Mary's wish, and at nine o'clock she contrived to slip away in the evening, unnoticed, to meet her lover on the sands. True, it was not moonlight. She had forgotten that the moon would not rise; but after the first disappointment, she was consoled by the muttering of distant thunder, and the dark and stormy appearance of the night; a storm would have been a more romantic parting scene than any moonlight could afford. So when Marmaduke joined her, she was in a proper state of excitement, and felt as miserable as the most exacting school-girl could require. The sea, as it broke sullenly upon the shore, heaved not its bosom with a heavier sigh, than that with which she greeted her lover, and nestled in his arms. She wept bitterly, reproached her fate, and wished to die that moment. Marmaduke, who had never before seen such a display of her affection, was intensely gratified, and with passionate protestations of his undying love, endeavored to console her.

But she did not want to be consoled. As she could not be happy with him, her only relief was to be miserable. Self-pity was the balm for her wounds. By making herself thoroughly wretched, she stood well in her own opinion. In fact, without her being aware of it, her love sprang not from the heart, but from the head. She was acting a part in her own drama, and naturally chose the most romantic part.

The storm threatened, but did not burst. The heavens continued dark, and the white streaks of foam cresting the dark waves were almost the only things the eye could discern. The lovers did not venture far from the house, but paced up and down, occasionally pausing in the earnestness of talk.

Their conversation need not be recorded here; the more so as it was but a repetition of one or two themes, such as the misery of their situation, the constancy of their affection, and their sanguineness of his speedy return and their happy union.

"Marmaduke," she said at last, "it is getting late; Mrs. Henley will miss me; I must go."

"A moment longer; one moment."

"Only a moment. Dearest Marmaduke, will you never forget me? Will you think of me always? Will you write as often as you can? Let us every night, at twelve, look at the moon; it will be so sweet to know that at that moment each is doing the same thing, and each thinking of the other. You will not lose my locket? But stay; you have never given me a lock of your hair. Do so now."

He took a penknife from his pocket, and with noble disregard to his appearance, cut off a large lock of his black hair, which he folded in a piece of paper, and gave to her. She kissed it many times, and vowed its place should be upon her heart. Then, after throwing herself into his arms, in one last embrace of despair, she broke from him, and darted into the house, rushed up into a bed-room, threw herself outside the bed, and gave way to so vehement a fit of crying, that when Mrs. Henley came in to look for her, she found her in hysterics.

N.B.—Sixteen months afterward, Mary Hardcastle became Mrs. Meredith Vyner.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

FOUR YEARS LATER.

Messire Bon l'a prise en mariage,
Quoiqu'il n'ait plus que quatre cheveux gris;
Mais comme il est le premier du pays
Son bien supplée au défaut de son age.
LAFONTAINE.

My heroines have grown up into young women since we last saw them idling on the sands; and it is proper that I should at once give some idea of their appearance. Rose and Blanche, children by the first wife, are very unlike their sister Violet, the only child of the second Mrs. Vyner: they are fair, as Englishwomen only are fair; she is dark, as the children of the south are dark. They are plump and middle-sized; she is thin and very tall. They are settling into rounded womanhood; she is at that undeveloped "awkward age" when the beauty of womanhood has not yet come to fill the place of the vanished grace of childhood.

Two prettier creatures than Blanche and Rose, it would be impossible to find. There were sisterly resemblances peeping out amidst the most charming differences. I know not which deserved the palm; Rose, with her bright gray eyes swimming in mirth, her little piquant nose with its nostrils so delicately cut, her ruddy pouting lips, which Firenzuola would with justice have called "*fontana de tutte le amorose dolcezze*," her dimpled cheeks; and the whole face, in short, radiant with lovingness and enjoyment. Shakspeare, who has said so many exquisite things of women, has painted Rose in one line:—

Pretty and witty, wild, and yet, too, gentle.

But then Blanche, with her large, dreamy eyes, loving mouth, and general expression of meekness and devotion, was, in her way, quite as bewitching. As for poor Violet, she was almost plain: it was only those lustrous eyes, so unlike the eyes of ordinary mortals, which redeemed her thin, sallow face. If plain, however, it had already great energy, great character, and a strange mixture of the most womanly caressing gentleness, with haughtiness and willfulness that are quite startling. Those who remember her as a lovely child, prophesy that she will become a splendid woman.

From the three girls, let us turn our eyes to the strange step-mother which fate—or rather foolishness and cunning—had given them.

Mary Hardcastle, at the age of twenty, was placed in perhaps the most critical position which can await a young woman, viz., that of step-mother to girls very little younger than herself. In that situation, she exhibited uncommon skill; the very difficulties of it were calculated to draw out her strategetical science, in the disposition of her troops; and certainly few women have ever arranged circumstances with more adroitness than herself. She was a step-mother, indeed, and the reader anticipates what kind of step-mother; but she was too cunning to fall into the ordinary mistake of ostensibly assuming the reins of government. Apparently, she did nothing; she was not the mistress of her own house; she never undertook the management of a single detail. A meek, submissive wife, anxious to gain the affection of her "dear girls;" trembling before the responsibilities of her situation, she not only deluded the world, but she even deceived Captain Heath, and almost reconciled him to the marriage. Nay, what was more remarkable, she deceived the girls—at least the two elder girls. They were her companions—her pets. Before people, she adored them; in private, she gave them pretty clearly to understand that all their indulgences came from her; and all their privations from their father. It was her wish, indeed, that her dear girls should want for nothing, but papa was so obstinate—he could not be persuaded.

Strange discrepancies between word and deed would sometimes show themselves, but how was it possible to doubt the sincerity of one whose language and sentiments were so kind and liberal? She herself trembled before her husband, and often got the girls to intercede for her. The natural consequence was that they soon became convinced that papa was very much altered, and that as he grew older, he grew less kind.

Altered he was. Formerly he had secluded himself in his study, interfering scarcely at all in family arrangements, making few observations upon what his children did; and if not taking any great interest in them, at least behaving with pretty uniform kindness. Now, he was forever interfering to forbid this, to put a stop to that; discovering that he "really could not afford" that which hitherto he had always allowed them; and, above all, discovering that his daughters were always trying to "govern" in his house.

Violet alone was undeceived. She had always hated Mary Hardcastle, without precisely knowing why; now she hated her because occupying the place which her dear mother had occupied, and that, too, in a spirit of hypocrisy, evident in her eyes. Violet, therefore, at once fixed the change in her father upon her step-mother. How it was accomplished she knew not; but she was certain of the fact.

The mystery was simple. Meredith Vyner, like all weak men, had an irresistible tendency to conceal his weakness from himself, by what he called some act of firmness. He would have his own way, he said. He would not be

governed. He would be master in his own house. Mrs. Vyner saw through him at a glance. Wishing to separate him from his children and so preserve undisputed sway over him, she artfully contrived to persuade him that he had always suffered himself to be governed by his children, and that he had not a will of his own. Thus prompted, he was easily moved to exert his authority with some asperity whenever his wife insinuated that it was disregarded; and he established a character for firmness, in his own eyes, by thwarting his daughters, and depriving them of indulgences.

Moreover, Mrs. Vyner was, or affected to be, excessively jealous of his affection for the girls. He neglected her for them, she said; of course she could not expect it to be otherwise, were they not his children? were they not accustomed to have every thing give way to them? What was she? an interloper. Yet she loved him—foolishly, perhaps, but she loved him—and love would be jealous, would feel hurt at neglect.

Vyner, delighted and annoyed at this jealousy, assured her that it was groundless; but the only assurance she would accept was acts, not words; accordingly the poor old man was gradually forced to shut his heart against his girls; or, at any rate, to cease his demonstrations of affection, merely to get peace.

In a few sentences I convey the result of months of artful struggle; but the reader can understand the process by which this result was obtained, especially if I indicate the nature of the empire Mrs. Vyner had established.

Vyner was completely fascinated by the little coquette. It was not only his senses, but his mind, that was subdued. She had early impressed him with two convictions: one, the extreme delicacy of her nerves; the other, her immense superiority to himself. The first conviction was impressed upon him by the alarming hysterics into which contradiction, or any other mental affliction, threw her. If any thing went wrong—if the girls resisted her authority—if her own wishes were not gratified, she did not command, she did not storm; she wept silently, retired to her room, and was found there lifeless, or in an alarming state, by the first person who went in.

The second conviction took more time to establish, but she established it by perpetually dinning into his ear that he could not "understand her." Nor, in truth, could he. She had a lively imagination, and was fond of the most imaginative poetry;—the less disposition he manifested toward it, the more she insinuated how necessary a part it was of all exalted minds. In her views of art, of life and of religion, she was always exaggerated, and what the Germans call *schwärmerisch*. Vyner was as prosaic as prose, and owned his incapacity for "those higher raptures" which were said to result from "an exalted ideal." What we do not understand, we always admire or despise. Vyner admired.

One admirable specimen of her tactics was to make him feel that, although she loved him, she did not love him with all the ardor of her passionate nature; and a hope was adroitly held out, that upon him only depended whether she should one day acknowledge that he had her entire affections. To gain this end, what man would not have made himself a slave? If any man could resist such an attraction, Vyner was not that man; and he submitted to every caprice, in the deluded hope of seeing his submission crowned with its reward.

In effect, Mrs. Vyner's will was law; yet so dexterously did she contrive matters, that it always seemed as if Vyner was the sole ordainer of every thing. He was the puppet, moving as she pulled the wires, and gaining all the odium for her acts.

Violet, as I said, was the only one who saw this. She read her step-mother's character aright; and by her Mrs. Vyner knew that she was judged. She used her best arts to gain Violet's good opinion, tried to pet her in every way, but nothing availed: the haughty girl was neither to be blinded nor cajoled.

One day Vyner found his wife in tears. He inquired the cause. She wept on, and could not be induced to speak. He entreated her to confide her sorrows to him, which, after long pressing, she did as follows—

"Oh! it is very natural," she said, sobbing; "very—I have no right to complain: none. I ought never to have married."

"Dearest Mary, *what* is the matter?"

"I have no right to be afflicted. I ought to have been prepared for it. Of course, it must be so. Yet I did hope to make them love me. I love them so. I tried all I could; but I am a step-mother—every one will tell them that a step-mother is unkind."

"The ungrateful things!"

Vyner was really incensed against his daughters before he knew what they had done, simply because they were the cause of his conjugal peace being disturbed.

"Rose and Blanche, indeed," sobbed his wife, "do give me credit sometimes, but Violet hates me—hates me because I married you. She is jealous of your regard for me. She says you ought never to have married again—perhaps she is right, but it is cruel for me to hear it."

"The wretched girl!"

"She will never forget I am not her mother—she looks upon our marriage as a crime, I believe!"

A spasm, short but sharp, was visible on his face; but the touch of remorse quickly gave way to anger. He felt, indeed, that he had acted wrongly in marrying again, especially in marrying one so young. He knew that well enough, knew what the world must think of it; but nothing, as she knew, made him so angry as any allusion to it. The sense of his fault exasperated his sense of the impertinence of those who ventured to speak of it. He had surely a right to do as he pleased. He loved a charming, a "most superior" woman, and he "supposed *he* was to be considered, no less than his children." It was very strange that he should be expected to sacrifice every thing to them. Other fathers were not so complaisant.

And yet, through all the arguments which irritated self-love could suggest, there pierced the consciousness of his error. That Violet should resent his marriage was no more than

natural; but his wife well knew the tender chord she touched, when she thus alluded to his daughter's feelings.

That day she said no more. She allowed herself to be consoled. But by bringing up the subject again from time to time, she contrived to instill into his mind a mingled fear and dislike of his favorite child.

Whenever Violet and her step-mother had any "difference"—which was not unfrequent—Vyner always sided against his daughter; and his wife's demeanor being one of exasperating meekness, as if she were terrified at Violet's vehemence, he always told people that "his youngest daughter was unfortunately such a devil that there was no living with her, and that his wife was tyrannized over in a way that was quite pitiable."

At last Violet was sent away from home—that she might not corrupt her sisters, it was said—in reality, that she might be got out of the way. Vyner thereby secured peace, and his wife got rid of an unfavorable judge. The poor girl was placed under the care of two "strong-minded" women, who had been duly prejudiced against her, and whose cue it was to work upon her religious feelings, and awaken her to a sense of the duty she owed her *parents*. She soon detected their object, and rebelled. Disagreeable scenes took place, which ended in Violet escaping from their odious care, and flying to her fox-hunting uncle's, in Worcestershire, where she was received with open arms. Being very fond of his niece, he wrote to Vyner, requesting permission to be allowed to keep her with him for some time, promising that she should not want masters, and that her education should be carefully attended to. The permission was granted, after some difficulty, and Violet was happily settled in Worcestershire, while her two sisters, grown too handsome and too old to be kept longer at home, were dispatched to the establishment kept by Mrs. Wirrelston and Miss Smith, at Brighton.

Before accompanying them, I have one more point to dwell on, and that was the sudden fit of economy which had seized Mrs. Vyner. The estate, though large, was greatly encumbered, and it was, moreover, entailed. Vyner, always "going" to make some provision for his girls, had never done so; he had—weak, vacillating, procrastinating man as he was—"put it off," and trusted, perhaps, to the girls marrying well. Mrs. Vyner determined to economize; to save yearly a large sum, which was to be set aside. In pursuance of this plan, she began the most extraordinary retrenchments, and dressed the girls in a style of plainness and economy by no means in accordance with their feelings. In justice, I should add, that she dressed herself in the same style. People were loud in their praises at her generous self-sacrifice; but, as she sentimentally observed, for her dear girls she could do any thing." Perhaps, of all her efforts at securing the reputation of an exemplary step-mother, none met with such universal approbation as this economical fit. I am sorry to be forced to add, that while economizing even to meanness, in some departments, she was so lavish in her expenditure in others, as, in effect, to plunge Vyner deeper into debt than ever.

CHAPTER II.

ROSE WRITES TO VIOLET.

Dearest Vi,

Your letter amused us very much; and we have both for a long while been going to answer it, but have not found time. Don't be angry at our silence.

We left home rather low spirited. Home, indeed, was no longer the happy place it had been, though mamma, say what you will, is not to blame for that; but, nevertheless, leaving it made us unhappy. Having grown up into young women without being sent to school, we did not like the idea of going at last.

The snow was falling fast when we arrived; and a dreary January day by no means enlivened our prospects. We looked wistfully out of the carriage-windows, and saw the steady descent of the countless snow-flakes darkening the air, and making the day miserable. Nothing met our eyes but the same endless expanse of snow-covered ground—cheerless, cold, and desolate—the uncomfort of winter without its picturesqueness. But, cold and cheerless as the day was, it was nothing to the cheerlessness of the frigid politeness and patronizing servility of Miss Smith and Mrs. Wirrelston, our school-mistresses. I am a physiognomist, you know, and from the first moment, I disliked them. Blanche thought them very kind and attentive. I thought them too attentive: the humbugs!

They froze me. I foresaw the mistresses they would make, and that is why I instinctively felt that the miserable day was more genial and clement than they. The snow would cease; in a few hours, gleams of sunshine would make it sparkle; in a few weeks, it would disappear. But the wintry frost of their politeness would deepen and deepen into sterner cold; there was no hope of sunshine under that insincere manner.

I hope you admire that paragraph! But for fear you should imagine I am about to turn authoress, I must let you into the secret: it is an application to my situation of a passage I met with yesterday in a novel one of the girls has smuggled in.

It was about four o'clock when we arrived. We were shown into the school-room, where we found about nine other girls, from twelve to seventeen years old, with whom we soon made acquaintance. We first asked each other's names; then communicated our parentage; then followed questions as to previous schools, and as to what sort of a place this was. Accounts varied considerably. Some thought it very well, and liked Mrs. Wirrelston. Some thought it detestable, and detested Mrs. Wirrelston. One and all detested Miss Smith.

The elder girls seemed very nice; but, from always having been at school, I suppose, they struck me as excessively ignorant of the world, compared with us, and still more ignorant of books. They were children to us. Our superior knowledge, which was quickly discovered, made us looked up to, and we were assailed with questions. But if we were for a moment looked up to on that account, we speedily lost our supremacy on another. One of the young-

er girls asked me how much pocket-money we had brought.

"Twenty shillings each."

"Twenty shillings! what! only twenty shillings! Why I brought five pounds."

"And I, ten," proudly ejaculated another.

I felt deeply ashamed; the more so as I observed the girls interchange certain looks, which were but too intelligible. Next day we had the mortification of hearing each new comer informed, and in a tone of disgusted astonishment, that "the Vyners had only brought twenty shillings each. Only think!"

I instantly wrote home to papa. But his answer was, that we must learn to be economical, that he was learning it himself, and that mamma thinks it highly necessary we should early learn to submit to small privations. I hate economy!

To return to our school, however. The first afternoon was spent in chat and games. Lessons were not to commence till the morrow. And as the morrow was very much like other days, I may sketch our routine. While dressing, we have to learn a verse of Scripture out of a book called "Daily Bread." (I got punished the other day for saying it was very "dry bread, too." That odious, little, pimply Miss Pinkerton told Miss Smith of it.) This verse we all repeat one after the other when prayers are finished; and, as I seldom know my verse when we come down, I contrive to sit at the end of the table, and learn it by hearing all the others say it before me. One of the elder and one of the little girls then collect the Bibles and put them away; while the rest of us, rank and file, begin to march, heads up, chests expanded, toes out. This military exercise, is not, I believe, to fashion us into a regiment of grenadiers—the Drawing-room Invincibles—because, when I suggested that we ought to have mustaches and muskets, I received a severe reprimand for my levity. Besides, we vary the march with little operations scarcely to be called military: touching, or trying to touch, the floor with the tips of our fingers without bending our knees, making our elbows meet behind our backs, &c. We then go into breakfast, and are allowed to exchange our merciless slaughter of French idiom, for the freely flowing idiom of our mother tongue. I have not had the French mark yet, except for speaking English; my French, I am happy to say, is beyond the criticism of the girls: what *their* mastery of the language is, you may guess by that! You may also gain a faint idea of it from these specimens. I passed the mark to little Miss Pinkerton only yesterday, because she asked me for my penknife in this elegant style: "*Madle., voulez vous pretez moi votre* COUTEAU?" Whereupon I whipped the mark into her hands with a generous "*Le voilà.*" Last week she said, "*Je n'ai pas encore* FAIT;" for "I have not done (finished) yet"—and pointed out to me, "*Comme vous avez mal coupé vos* CLOUS"—meaning, that I had not cut my finger nails well!

At meals, we are permitted to speak like Christians. After breakfast we have half an hour's recreation. We play, or read, or work, or, twining an arm round our confidante's waist, interchange confidences, respecting the lovers we have had, and the husbands we intend to have. Then come lessons. There are five pianos—and five unhappy girls are always practicing on them. We arrange our lessons so as to take the pianos in turns, and by this means, we all get our practice, and the thumping never ceases. What a life those pianos lead! How I wish Miss Smith were one of them!

The drawing-master comes at eleven. We don't learn. Papa allows no extras, except dancing—he says they're "so foolish." I am sorry we don't learn, for Mr. Hibbert, our master, is a perfect duck!—such a nice face, with glossy hair, turned into a sweet little curl on his forehead; large whiskers, rosy complexion, and we all say he is consumptive. Then he draws so well—so boldly! His strokes are as straight, and as broad and black as—I haven't got a simile. But you should see the copies he sets; boats on the sea-shore, turned on their sides, with handsome fishermen standing by, occupied with their nets, and pretty, fat children dotting the sands; or nice little cottages, with smoke (so natural!) coming from the chimneys, and large trees by them, and a dog or a cow, or else a splendid castle, with turrets, and drawbridges, and knights in armor on horseback. Mr. Hibbert ought to be an academician! *

At twelve, when the weather permits, we go out for a walk. In formidable files of twos and twos, we gravely tread the esplanade and *circumambient* streets (isn't that a nice word?—I got it from Miss Smith). We there see withered old Indians, invalids in chairs, wheeled about in search of Hygeia, dowagers, and some officers, with such mustaches—the darlings! We quiz the passers-by, and sometimes discuss their attractions. Some of the men look so *impudent!* And one always blows a kiss to us as we pass—that is, he blows it to *me*. I'm sure he's a rake.

At half-past two, we dress for dinner. At three, we dine. The food is plain but good, and abundant. After dinner we have more lessons, till six. Then tea; then we amuse ourselves, if we have learned all our lessons and tasks, either with books or fancy-work. At eight, to bed.

All the days are like this, except Sunday; and oh! what a dreary day is Sunday! What with church twice, Collects to learn, explanations of the Psalms and Catechism, our day is pretty well occupied. We take no walk—we are allowed no recreation. "Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress," and a few religious tales are the only things allowed to those who have said Collect and Catechism, and have time to spare. I hate Bunyan!

But this is not all. If any one has had the three bad marks during the week, the punishment is to sit in the corner all Sunday, and learn a sermon: she is not allowed to speak all day, except to the governesses. Miss Smith has more than once punished me in that way, and you may imagine how it increases my love for her!

* This last sentence makes me suspect that the whole paragraph is a bit of the saucy Rose's irony, and that she is quizzing the admiration of her schoolfellows for Mr. Hibbert. But school-girls have such strange idols, that she *may* be serious here.—*Author's Note.*

Well, after this long dreary day comes evening lecture. Oh, Vi.! if any thing could make school more odious than it is, that evening lecture would be the thing! Picture to yourself eighteen weary girls, after a day's absence from any recreation, having swallowed their tea, and then forced to sit in the school-room on hard benches, without backs, in prim silence, awaiting the arrival of the Rev. Josiah Dutton, who sometimes keeps us waiting for at least an hour. We are not allowed to speak. We are not allowed to read. We sit there in silent expectation; which a figuratively historical pen would liken (by way of a new simile) to the senators of Rome awaiting the Gauls. We sit and look at the candles, look at the ceiling, look at the governesses, and look at each other. At last the door opens, and the reverend Dutton appears. He takes his place at a desk, and begins in a droning voice, meant to be impressive, a lecture or sermon which we do not attend to. I sit opposite to him, and am forced to keep my eyes fixed upon him, because I know Miss Smith's are fixed upon me. There I sit, my back aching from want of support, my eyes *drawing straws* in the candles, till I feel as if I should grow blind, wearied with the unvaried occupation of the day, and still more wearied by the effort to keep up my attention to what I can not interest myself in, what indeed, for the most part, I can not comprehend.

There, my dear Vi., you have a return for your long letter, and an encouragement to write again. I'm literally at the end of my paper, for this is the last sheet I have in the world. Blanche is to write to you to-morrow.

P. S.—Unless you have an opportunity of getting your letter delivered by private hand, mind what you say! All ours are opened. This will be put in the post, in London, by one of my companions, who goes there for a couple of days; otherwise, I dare not have sent it.

CHAPTER III.

THE HAPPY SCHOOL-DAYS.

Rose and Blanche remained three years at Mrs. Wirrelston's.

Rose's letter has disclosed to us a sufficiently detailed account of their school existence; but she has omitted one very important point—for the very excellent reason that, at the time she wrote, it had not shown itself. She speaks, indeed, of the surprise and contempt of the girls when they learned how scantily her purse was furnished; but the full effects of that were only developed some time afterward.

A school is an image of the world in miniature, and represents it, perhaps, in its least amiable aspect. The child is not only father to the man, but the father, before experience has engendered tolerance, before suffering has extended sympathy. The child is horribly selfish, because unreflectingly so. Its base instincts have not been softened or corrected. All its vices are not only unrestrained, but unconcealed. Its egotism and vanity are allowed full play.

Rose's schoolfellows were quite aware of the beauty and mental superiority which distinguished her and Blanche; and envied them for it. But they were also fully aware of the scantiness of their allowance, and the inferiority of their dress; and despised them heartily, undisguisedly. Poverty, which is an inexcusable offense in the great world, becomes a sort of crime at school. The love of tyranny implanted in the human breast, and always flourishing in children, gratified itself by subjecting Rose and Blanche to endless sarcasms on that score. The little irritations which arose, in the natural course of things, between them and their schoolfellows, were sure to instigate some sarcasm on "mean little creatures"—"vulgar things"—"penniless people," &c. It was a safe and ready source of annoyance: a weapon always at hand, adapted to the meanest capacity, and certain to wound.

Beyond the indignities which it drew down upon them, the absence of pocket-money was a serious inconvenience. They had only two shillings a week each as an allowance; out of which they had to find their own pens, pencils, paper, india-rubber, sealing-wax, and trifles—indispensable trifles of that kind; besides having to put sixpence every fortnight into the poor-box. The hardship of this was really terrible. The word may seem a strong one, but if we measure the importance of things by the effects they produce, it will not seem too strong. To men and women, all this inconvenience may seem petty. It was not petty to the unhappy girls: it was the cause of constant humiliation and bitter sorrow.

Parents little imagine the extent of their cruelty, when, to gratify their own ambition, they send children to expensive schools, and refuse to furnish them with the means of being on a footing of equality with their schoolfellows. The effects of such conditions are felt throughout the after life. The misery children endure from the taunting superiority of their companions, is only half the evil; the greater half is in the moral effects of such positions.

Upon natures less generous, healthy, and good than those of Rose and Blanche, the evil would have been incalculable. Even upon them, it was not insignificant. It over-developed the spirit of opposition in Rose; it crushed the meek spirit of Blanche. Rose, with her vivacity and elasticity, could best counteract and forget it; but it sank deeply into the quiet, submissive soul of Blanche, and made her singularly unfitted to cope with the world; as the sequel of this story will show.

I do not wish to exaggerate the influence of this school experience; I am well aware of the ineradicable propensities and dispositions of human beings; but surely it is right to assume that certain dispositions are fostered or misdirected by certain powerful conditions; and no disposition could be otherwise than damaged by being subjected to distressing humiliation from companions, and on grounds over which the victim had no earthly control.

A miserable life Rose and Blanche led. Disliked by Mrs. Wirrelston and Miss Smith, because they learned no extras—that fruitful source of profit—and because they were so ill-dressed as to be no "credit to the establishment;" they were taunted by their schoolfellows, because unable to join in any subscription which was set on foot. To any one who

knows the female mind, I need not expatiate on the contempt which frowned upon their shabby attire. To be ill-dressed; to have none of the novelties; to continue wearing frocks out of the season, and which were out-grown; to be shivering in white muslin in the beginning of December.

Yes, reader, in December; for winter clothing they had none, and their parents were abroad.

Mrs. Vyner's neglect is perhaps excusable when we reflect how young she was, and how unfit for the position she occupied; but the effects of that neglect were very important.

"Poor things!" exclaimed Letitia Hoskins, a citizen's daughter, in all the insolence engendered by consols; "their father can't afford to clothe them."

"Yet why doesn't he send them to a cheaper school?" suggests Amelia Wingfield.

"Vulgar pride. I dare say he's some shopkeeper. He wishes his daughters to be educated with ladies."

"Meant for governesses, I shouldn't wonder."

"Most likely, poor things!"

In vain did Rose and Blanche repeatedly answer such assertions, by declaring their father's family was one of the most ancient in England (Miss Hoskins gave an exasperating chuckle of ridicule at that), and was worth twelve thousand a year. A derisive shout was the only answer. The girls would not have believed it, however credible; and it was on the face of it a very incredible statement, coming from girls who, as Letty Hoskins once observed, "had the meanness to come there with a sovereign each, and one pot of bears' grease between them. Girls who were never dressed half so genteelly as her mamma's maid."

"And learn no extras," added little Miss Pinkerton, with a toss of her head. "When I told Rose that I had got on so well with my drawing (especially the *shading!*) that Mr. Hibbert said I might soon begin drawing with *creoles*, she burst out laughing, and said she had never heard of that branch of the art before. Fancy a girl of nineteen never having heard of drawing with creoles!"

"With *crayons*, I suppose you mean," suggested Amelia Wingfield, contemptuously.

"Well, it's all the same; *she* had never heard of it."

Rose was witty enough to take fearful reprisals on those who offended her; but, although she thus avenged herself, she was always sure to be worsted in the war of words. Nothing she could say cut so deep as the most stupid reflection on her dress or poverty. No sarcasm she could frame told like the old—but never too old—reference to governesses.

Nevertheless, her vivacity and humor in some measure softened the ill impression created by her poverty. She amused the girls so much, that they never allowed their insolence to be more than a passing thing. Often would she make the whole school merry with some exquisitely ludicrous parody of Mrs. Wirrelston or Miss Smith. The latter was her especial butt. She reveled in quizzing her. She knew well enough that the laughers, with the treachery of children, first enjoyed the joke, and then repeated it to Miss Smith, to enjoy the joker's punishment, and to curry favor with the governess. No matter; Rose knew she was sure to be betrayed, yet her daring animal spirits were constantly inciting her to make fun of her ridiculous mistress.

Miss Smith was a starch virago. Bred to the profession of governess, she had considerable acquirements—of which she was very vain—and great sense of the "responsibility" of her situation, which showed itself in a morbid watchfulness over the "morals of her young charges." Her modesty was delicate and easily alarmed; nothing, for instance, would induce her to mention sparrows before gentlemen—those birds having rather a libertine reputation in natural history—she called them "little warblers." Again: the word *belly* was carefully erased from Goldsmith's History of England, and *stomach* substituted in the margin. Rose once pointed this out to the girl standing next to her at class, and was duly punished for her "impropriety."

Miss Smith was not handsome. Her complexion was of a bilious brown, mottled with pimples. Her nose was thin and pointed; the nostrils pinched up, as if she were always smelling her own breath, and that breath stronger but not sweeter than the rose. The lips thin and colorless. Her figure tall and fleshless. There was a rigidity and primness in her whole appearance, which lent itself but too easily to caricature; and Rose, whose good nature would have spared a kinder person, had no remorse in ridiculing the ungenerous mistress, who visited upon her and her sister the sins of their father.

On the day selected for our glimpse into this school, Rose was shivering over a long task, which had been given her for the following audacity. Miss Smith had been "reviling in good set terms" the character of Meredith Vyner. Rose's blood had mounted to her cheek, but she was silent, conscious that any retort would only indulge her mistress, by showing that the abuse of her father was a sore subject. She affected to have lost her copy of Goldsmith, and to be in great concern about it. As it was only a common schoolbook, bound in mottled calf, Miss Pinkerton could not understand her anxiety about it, sarcastically adding, "*My* papa doesn't care how many books I have. He can afford it." "Oh, it isn't the book," replied Rose, confidentially, "it's the *binding! Real Smithskin!*"

Blanche and Miss Pinkerton both laughed; and the latter immediately informed Miss Smith of the joke, and of Blanche's participation. For this offense they were both punished; but the name remained: to this day the mottled calf binding is by the girls called Smithskin.

It was near the breaking up, and the elder girls, with the horrible servility of children of both sexes when at school, had set on foot a subscription to present Mrs. Wirrelston and Miss Smith with some token of their regard. Miss Hoskins had put her name down for thirty shillings. Others had subscribed a pound, and others ten shillings; even the younger girls had put down five shillings each. When the list was brought to Rose and Blanche, they said they had no money.

"Of course not," said Miss Hoskins; "what's the use of asking them? You will ask the servants next."

Blanche raised her mild face, and said—

"I would subscribe if I could, but how is it possible? You girls come to school with ten pounds or more in your pockets, and you have other presents besides. Papa refuses to allow us pocket-money—says we can have no use for it."

"All that is true," added Rose; "but if we *had* money I would not subscribe. I have no regard for them, and the only token I would offer them is a copy of 'Temper,' bound in Smithskin."

"Oh!" ejaculated several, pretending to be very much shocked.

"Or 'Don Juan,'" pursued Rose, "binding ditto. I'm sure Miss Smith reads it, because it's called improper."

The girls were so much shocked at this that they moved away; but they did not dare repeat it, so fearful did it seem!

Mrs. Wirrelston entered. Anger darkened her brow, though she endeavored to be calm and dignified. They all read what was underneath that calmness, and awaited in silence till she should speak. She held in her hand an open letter, which she passed to Miss Smith, who having read it, looked starcher and more bilious than ever.

The letter was from Meredith Vyner to his children, and this was the postscript:—

"As you are to leave school at Christmas, mind you don't forget to bring away with you your spoons and forks."

It was the custom at Mrs. Wirrelston's, as at most schools, to exact from each pupil, that she should bring her own silver spoons and fork, also her sheets and towels; a very satisfactory arrangement, which saved the schoolmistress from an expense, and, as the pupils always left them behind, was the foundation of a respectable stock of plate when the mistress should retire into private life. But the enormity of a pupil taking away her own spoons and fork, had hitherto been unheard of; and the *meanness* of a parent who could remind his children of their property, appeared to Mrs. Wirrelston and Miss Smith something exceeding even what they had anticipated from Meredith Vyner. And yet they had formed an exalted view of his capacity in that way, from the odious criticisms which he permitted himself on certain charges in the half-yearly accounts—charges which had always been admitted by the parents of other pupils, and which, if difficult to justify, no man of "common liberality" would question. This "tradesmanlike" spirit of examining accounts had greatly irritated the two ladies, and they paid off, in ill-treatment to Rose and Blanche, the annoyance caused by their father's pedantic accuracy.

The way in which this postscript was received may be readily imagined. It was the climax of a series of insults. "One would imagine that Mrs. Wirrelston and Miss Smith wanted to *keep* the paltry spoons—which were very light after all. As if it were the custom at that establishment to retain the young ladies' property."

"But be careful, young ladies," said Mrs. Wirrelston, with great sarcasm in her tone; "be careful that the Misses Vyner leave nothing behind them. It might be awkward. We might be called upon. Every thing is of some value. Be sure that the ends of their lead-pencils are packed up."

"Yes," interposed Miss Smith, "and don't forget their curl-papers. The Misses Vyner will certainly like to pack up their curl-papers."

Blanche, unable to endure these unjust taunts, burst into tears. But Rose, greatly incensed, said—

"All that should be said to papa, not to us; since he is to blame, if there *is* any blame."

"You are insolent! Go to your room, Miss Vyner!" exclaimed Mrs. Wirrelston.

Miss Smith lifted up her eyes in amazement at such audacity.

"I do not see," pursued the undaunted Rose, "why we are to be taunted, because papa wishes to see his own property."

"You don't see, you impertinent girl!"

"No, I do not, unless our taking home our own spoons should be a ruinous *precedent*."

The sarcasm cut deeply. Both mistresses were roused to vehemence by it; and vowing that such insolence was altogether insupportable, ordered her boxes to be packed up, and expelled her that very afternoon.

Rose was by no means affected at the expulsion; but poor Blanche, who was now left alone to bear the spite and malice of two mistresses for three weeks longer, greatly felt the loss of her sister's company, the more so because the other girls, at all times distant, had now sided with their mistresses, and actually refused to associate in any way with her.

But the three weeks passed. Breaking up arrived. It is needless to say how many prizes were adjudged to Blanche Vyner at the distribution. She only thought of the joy of being once more at home.

CHAPTER IV.

ROSE AND BLANCHE AT HOME.

No doating mother could have seemed kinder to her daughters than was Mrs. Meredith Vyner to Rose and Blanche, for the first three weeks after their arrival from school. She insisted upon their each having a separate allowance; but contrived that it should be totally inadequate to the necessary expenses. She shopped with them, but recommended, in a tone which was almost an insistance, colors which neither suited their complexions, nor assorted well with each other. She made them numberless little presents, and was always saying charming things to them. If they thought her pleasant before, they now declared her quite lovable. They looked up to her, not only as one having a mother's authority, but also as a superior being, for she had made a decided impression on them of that kind, by always condemning or ridiculing their own tastes and opinions as "girlish," and by carefully repeating (with what amount of embroidery I will not say) all the compliments which men paid her on her own supreme taste. The latter were not few. Partly because a pretty, lively woman

never is in want of them: the more so, because Mrs. Meredith Vyner not only courted admiration, but demanded it. What more natural, therefore, than that two girls, hearing from their father, who was so learned, such praises of their step-mother's talents, and observing such submission from other men to her tastes, should blindly acknowledge a superiority so proclaimed?

As if to make "assurance doubly sure," Mrs. Meredith Vyner would occasionally repeat to them, with strong disclaimers, as "unwarrantably satirical," certain depreciatory comments which had been made to her, she said, by men, the gist of which was, that they were not admired. After a while, the poor girls actually believed they were wanting in attractions. Rose's brilliant color was a milkmaid's coarseness, and Blanche's retiring manners were owing to a want of grace and style. Rose, who was merry, was given to understand that she was loud and vulgar. Blanche, who was all gentleness, had learned to consider herself as an uninteresting, apathetic, awkward girl.

To effect such impressions was only half a victory. The real triumph was to manage that the admiration which such beauty and such manners as theirs were sure to call forth should not efface these impressions. This was done by a very simple, but ingenious contrivance. Mrs. Meredith Vyner never gave balls, seldom accepted invitations to them, or to any dancing fêtes. She went out a great deal, and often received company, but her society was limited to dinners and conversaziones. The men were almost exclusively scientific, or members of Parliament, or celebrities. No specimen of the genus "Dancing Young Man" was ever asked. Nothing could suit Meredith Vyner better; neither his age nor his habits accorded with balls, while literary and scientific men were always welcome guests; so that he applauded his wife's wisdom in giving up the "frivolities," and hoped his girls would gladly follow her example.

By such and similar means she had got them, as the vulgar phrase goes, "completely under her thumb;" and that, too, without in any instance giving the world any thing to lay hold of which looked like a step-mother's unkindness. Indeed, the girls themselves, though they at last began to suspect something, could make no specific accusation. Mrs. Meredith Vyner might occasionally be said to err, but never to do any thing that could be interpreted into willful unkindness.

It may, perhaps, be wondered that—considering how much it was her desire to gain the golden opinions of the world as an exemplary step-mother, in a peculiarly trying situation—she did not see the simplest plan would have been real, not pretended, kindness.

But by her line of conduct she secured all she wanted—the appearances; and she secured two objects of more importance to her—one of interest, and one of *amour propre*. The first object was the complete separation of the children from their father. Determined to have undisputed sway over her husband, she isolated him from the affection of every one else, by a calculation as cruel as it was ingenious. The second object was the complete triumph she obtained over her daughters, whose age and beauty made them dreaded rivals. If mothers can not resist the diabolical suggestions of envy, but must often present the sad spectacle of a jealousy of their own children, how much more keenly must the rivalry he felt with their step-daughters, especially in England, where the unmarried women have the advantage? And the pretty little tiger-eyed Mrs. Vyner was too painfully conscious of her humpback, not to dread a comparison with the lovely Rose and Blanche.

I have to observe, also, that the economical fit no longer troubled Mrs. Vyner; she had launched into the extravagances of London society, with the same thorough-going impetuosity characteristic of all her actions. No fit ever lasted long with her; this of economy had endured an incredible time, and was now put aside, never again to be mentioned.

CHAPTER V.

MARMADUKE MEETS MRS. VYNER.

Every body was at Dr. Whiston's, as the phrase goes, on one of his Saturday evenings. Dr. Whiston was a scientific man, whose great reputation was founded upon what his friends thought him capable of doing, rather than upon any thing he had actually done. He was rich, and knew "every body." His Saturday evenings formed an integral part of London society. They were an institution. No one who pretended to any acquaintance with the aristocracy of science, or with the scientific members of the aristocracy, could dispense with being invited to Dr. Whiston's. There were crowded lions of all countries, pretty women, bony women, elderly women, strong-minded women, and mathematical women; a sprinkling of noblemen, a bishop or two, many clergymen, barristers, and endless nobodies with bald foreheads and spectacles, all very profound in one or more "ologies," but cruelly stupid in every thing else—abounding in "information," and alarmingly dull. Dr. Whiston himself was a man of varied knowledge, great original power, and a good talker. He passed from lions to doctors, from beauties to bores, with restless equanimity: a word for each, adapted to each; and every one was pleased.

The rooms were rapidly filling. The office of announcing the visitors had become a sinecure, for the very staircase was beginning to be invaded. Through the dense crowd of rustling dresses and formidable spectacles, adventurous persons on the search for friends made feeble way; but the majority stood still gazing at the lions, or endeavoring, by uneasy, fitful conversation, to seem interested. Groups were formed in the crowd and about the doorways, in which something like animated conversation went on.

In the center of the third room, standing by a table, on which were ranged some new inventions that occupied the attention of the bald foreheads and bony women, stood a young and striking-looking man of eight-and-twenty. A melancholy listlessness overspread his swarthy face, and dimmed the fire of his large eyes. The careless grace of his attitude admirably displayed the fine proportions of his almost gi-

gantic form, which was so striking as to triumph over the miserable angularity and meanness of our modern costume.

All the women, the instant they saw him, asked who he was. He interested every body except the bald foreheads and the strong-minded women; but most he excited the curiosity of the girls dragged there by scientific papas or mathematical mammas. Who could he be? It was quite evident he was not an ologist; he was too gentlemanly for a lion—too fresh-looking for a student.

"My dear Mrs. Meredith Vyner, how d'ye do? Rose, my dear, you look charming; and you too, Blanche. And where's papa?"

"Talking to Professor Forbes, in the first room," replied Mrs. Meredith Vyner to her questioner—one of the inspectors of Dr. Whiston's inventions.

"I am trying to get a seat for my girls," said Mrs. Vyner, peering about as well as her diminutive form would allow in so crowded a room.

"I dare say you will find one in the next room. Oh, come in; perhaps you can tell us who is that handsome foreigner in there? nobody knows him, and I can't get at Dr. Whiston to ask."

They all four moved into the third room, and the lady directed Mrs. Vyner's attention to the mysterious stranger.

It was Marmaduke Ashley.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner did not swoon—she did not even scream; though, I believe, both are expected of ladies under such circumstances, in novels. In real life it is somewhat different. Mrs. Vyner only blushed deeply, and felt a throbbing at her temples—felt, as people say, as if the earth were about to sink under her—but had too much self-command to betray any thing. One observing her would, of course, have noticed the change; but there happened to be no one looking at her just then, so she recovered her self-possession before her acquaintance had finished her panegyric on his beauty.

She had not seen Marmaduke since that night on which she parted from him, in a transport of grief, on the sands behind Mrs. Henley's house, when the thunder muttered in the distance, and the heavy, swelling sea threw up its sprawling lines of silvery foam—the night when he had hacked off a lock of his raven hair for her to treasure.

She had not seen him since that night, when the wretchedness of parting from him seemed the climax of human suffering, from which death—and only death—could bring release.

She had not seen him since she had become the wife of Meredith Vyner; and as that wife she was to meet him now.

What her thoughts would have been at that moment, had she ever really loved him, the reader may imagine; but as her love had sprung from the head and not the heart, she felt no greater pangs at seeing him, than were suggested by the sight of one she had deceived, and whom she would deceive again, were the past to be recalled. Not that she cared for her husband; she fully appreciated the difference between him and Marmaduke; at the same time she also appreciated the differences in their fortunes, and that reconciled her.

The appearance of Marmaduke at Dr. Whiston's rather flurried than pained her. She dreaded "a scene." She knew the awful vehemence of his temper; and although believing that in an interview she could tame the savage, and bring him submissive to her feet yet that could only be done by the ruse and fascination of a woman; and a soirée was by no means the theater for it.

She began to move away, having seated Rose and Blanche, trusting that her tiny person would not be detected in the crowd. But Marmaduke's height gave him command of the room. His eye was first arrested by a head of golden hair, the drooping luxuriance of which was but too well known to him; another glance, and the slightly deformed figure confirmed his suspicion. His pulses throbbed violently, his eyes and nostrils dilated, and his breathing became hard; but he had sufficient self-command not to betray himself, although his feelings, at the sight of her whom he had loved so ardently, and who had jilted him so basely, were poignant and bitter. He also moved away; not to follow her, but to hide his emotion.

Little did the company suspect what elements of a tragedy were working amid the dull prosiness of that soirée. Amid all the science that was gabbled, all the statistics quoted, all the small talk of the scientific scandal-mongers (perhaps the very smallest of small talk!), all the profundities that escaped from the bald foreheads and the strong-minded women, all the listlessness and ennui of the majority, there were a few souls who, by the earnestness and the sincerity of their passions, vindicated the human race—souls belonging to human beings, and not to mere *gobemouches* and ologists. These have some interest to the novelist and his public; so while the gabble and the twaddle are in triumphant career, let us cast our eyes only in those corners of the rooms where we may find materials.

To begin with Marmaduke. What a world of emotion is in the breast of that apparently unoccupied young man, carelessly passing from room to room! What thoughts hurry across his brain: thoughts of wrong, of vengeance, of former love, and present hate! Then Mrs. Meredith Vyner, all smiles and kind words, passing from group to group, throwing in a word of criticism here, a quotation there, listening to the account of some new discovery, as if she understood it and cared about it—who could suppose that a thousand rapid plans were presenting themselves to her fertile ingenuity, and all quickly discarded as too dangerous? It was indeed a question of some moment, how was she to meet Marmaduke? Should she give him the cut direct? Should she be sentimental? Should she be haughty?

Her resolution was still unformed when Marmaduke stood before her. Accidentally as they had approached, they were both too much occupied with each other to be in the least surprised. With a sudden impulse, she held out her hand to him. He affected not to see the charming frankness of her greeting, and when she said—

"I hope I must not recall myself to your recollection, Mr. Ashley!"

He replied, with exquisite ease—

"I know not what will be thought of my gal-

lantry, madam, but, indeed, I must own the impeachment."

"Then how must I be changed! To be forgotten in so short a time. Oh, you terrible man! I can never forgive you."

"I can never forgive myself; but so it is."

So perfectly was this epigram delivered, that those standing around could never have suspected he had said any thing but a commonplace. She was deeply wounded by his manner, and he read it in her cruel eyes; but the smile never left her face, and she introduced herself as Mrs. Meredith Vyner, with playfulness, throwing his forgetfulness on the lapse of time since they had met.

"You have the more reason to forgive me," said Marmaduke, "as my memory is so very bad, that, under the circumstances, I should have almost forgotten my own sister."

She winced, but laughingly replied—

"Well, well, there are many virtues in a bad memory. I suppose you forget injuries with the same Christian alacrity."

He laughed, and said—

"Oh, no! I have not the virtues of bad memory: do not invest me with them. If I easily forget faces, I never forget injuries."

She winced again, and this time felt a vague terror at the diabolical calmness and ease with which he could envelop a terrible threat in the slight laugh of affected modesty. Confusion, even bitterness, would have been more encouraging to her. She felt that she was in the presence of an enemy, and of one as self-possessed as herself.

"Have you been long in England?"

This was to get off the perilous ground on which they stood.

"A few months only."

"And do you intend remaining?"

"Yes; I fancy so. I have one or two affairs which will keep me here an indefinite time."

"I suppose it would be proper to assume that one of those is an *affaire de cœur?*"

"Well," he replied, laughing gently, "that depends upon how the word is used."

"I must not be indiscreet, but a mutual friend of ours told me there was a lady in the case."

She said this with a peculiarly significant intonation, as if to give him to understand that jealousy had driven her into marrying Meredith Vyner. He did not understand her meaning, but saw that she meant something, and replied—

"I confess to so much. In fact, one of the affairs I spoke about is the conclusion of a little comic drama, the commencement of which dates before I left England. Ah, Cecil! how d'ye do?"

This last sentence was addressed to Cecil Chamberlayne, an old acquaintance of Marmaduke's. During their conversation, Mrs. Meredith Vyner was enabled to pass on, and to reach the third room, where, with more agitation in her manner than the girls had ever remarked before, she summoned them to accompany her, saying that she felt too unwell to remain longer.

Blanche arose hastily, and with great sympathy inquired about the nature of her illness; to which she only received vague replies. Rose was evidently less willing to leave. Though why she was unwilling was not at first so apparent. By a retrospective glance at another little group in Doctor Whiston's salons, we shall be able to understand this.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW ROSE BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH OUR UGLY HERO.

About three quarters of an hour before, Rose and Blanche were seated on an ottoman, between two elderly women, ugly enough to be erudite, and repulsive enough to forbid any attempt at conversation. Silent the girls sat, occasionally interchanging a remark respecting the dress of some lady; and as a witticism was sure to follow from Rose, which Blanche was afraid might be overheard, even this sort of conversation was sparing, though so much food was offered. Not a soul spoke to them. They knew scarcely any one, for their step-mother studiously avoided introducing them. The consequence was, that many habitual visitors at their father's knew them by sight, but had no idea who they were; and many were the invitations in which they were not included, simply because their existence as young ladies who were "out" was not suspected.

While they sat thus alone, it was some relief to them to espy Mrs. St. John, whom they knew slightly, and who had recently purchased the Grange, an estate adjoining Wytton Hall. She came toward them, leaning on the arm of a young man, whom she introduced as her son; and one of the erudite woman rising at that moment to go, Mrs. St. John took possession of her seat, next to Blanche, leaving her son standing talking to Rose. In a very few minutes, a withered little man in large gold spectacles came up, and offering his arm to the other erudite female, carried her off, thus leaving a place, which Mr. St. John at once seized upon.

Julius St. John had not a person corresponding to the beauty of his name. Do not, my pretty reader, turn away your head; do not shrug your shoulders; do not skip the next page or so, because truth bids me inform you Julius was remarkably plain. I would have him handsome if I could. You may believe me, for I am perhaps a greater worshiper of beauty than you are; but it is, nevertheless, true, that I am now going to demand your admiration for a young man, who is undisguisedly, unequivocally plain. Not ugly—ugliness implies meanness, or moral deformity—yet absolutely without any feature which could redeem him from being familiarly called "a fright." Strikingly plain is the proper expression: so strikingly as, perhaps, to be the next best thing to beauty, from the force of the impression created. No one ever forgot his face. No one could casually perceive it without having the gaze arrested for a moment. Let me hasten to add, that the effect was almost repulsive, it was so powerful. I add this, lest you should suppose that I am going to trifle with the truth, and to soften my description by certain intimations of an expression of such exquisite sweetness and such delicate sensibil-

ity, such ideality, or such intellectual fire illuminating his face, that to all intents and purposes, my plain hero becomes a handsome man. No, reader, no; while I am perfectly aware that some plain features are rendered handsome by the expression, I am also aware that some faces—and the faces of very noble creatures—are irredeemably plain; and such was Julius St. John's. Judge:—

A head of enormous size was set upon the miserable shoulders of a diminutive body, which though not deformed, was so thin and small, that an energetic deformity would have been preferable. This head was covered with a mass of black, crisp, curly hair, which fell carelessly over a massive but irregular forehead, ornamented with two thick eyebrows, which, meeting over the nose, formed but one dark line. The eyes that looked underneath these were bright, but small. They looked through you; but what they expressed themselves it was seldom easy to guess. The nose was insignificant; the mobility of the nostrils alone attracted attention to it. The mouth was large—not ill-cut—but the lips full and sensual. The chin large; firmly, boldly cut. The complexion dark and spotted.

These features were not even redeemed by the look of a gentleman, or the look of an artist. Common, he did not look, nor vulgar, but striking; and, on the whole, repulsive. The best point about him was his consciousness of his ill-looks, and the freedom from any coxcombical effort to disguise it. He did not bring out his ugliness into relief by a foolish attention to dress, as most ugly men do. He was neither a dandy nor a sloven. That he was a "fright," he knew, and accepted his fate with manliness.

"Have you been looking at those?" he said to Rose, as he sank into the chair by her side, and pointed to the table on which the inventions were laid. "Perhaps you can explain them to me?"

"No, indeed, not I. I never understand any thing of that sort."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously! it's very stupid I know; but I am stupid. What I am able to understand, it would, perhaps, be difficult to say; but there can be no hesitation in excluding every thing like science or manufactures. They are my detestation."

"Whisper it not in Gath!" he said, with mock horror. "Only conceive where you are!"

"Very much out of place; but mamma has a fancy for coming here, and we are obliged to like it."

"Well, it is a comfort for me to find some one as ignorant as myself. Every body here is so alarmingly instructive. I find nobody ignorant of any thing but their own ignorance. Even the young ladies have attended Faraday, and the Friday evenings at the Royal Institution, till—"

She held up her finger threateningly, and said, "Now don't be severe, I am one of those young ladies: I never miss a Faraday, and am never allowed to miss a Friday evening. Oh! you need not look astonished. I sleep very comfortably there, believe me."

He laughed, and continued—

"Then I can forgive your attendance. Science ought to be quite content with female votaries of dubious ages. I am sure if it has the *bogies*, it may leave us idlers the beauties for our comfort. I quite sympathize with you in your aversion to manufactures. They are very wonderful, doubtless; but as I am not going to set up a mill or a factory of my own, the processes are superlatively uninteresting."

"And if I may be so bold as to ask it, why do I see you *here*?"

"Upon my word, I can hardly tell. Why does one go any where? Mere idleness and imitation. Wherever I go, it is almost always dull, and this house is duller than most; but one occasionally meets with a recompense, as I have this evening."

"In sitting next to me, eh? I accept the compliment, though it might have been newer."

"Well, at any rate, it bears out my confession of ignorance. I know not even how to turn a compliment!"

"Is not that Dr. Lindley?"

"I believe so. You are a disciple of his, of course? One may know botany without being formidable."

"I am glad of that, because I am supposed to be learned in that department."

"Then you have not the claim I set up for the new degree of C. I. D."

"Pray, what is that?"

"Doctor of Crass Ignorance, for which my pretensions are better than yours, as I scarcely know a rose from a rhododendron."

"But I only told you I was *supposed* to be learned, not that I am so. My reputation is very simply acquired. Whenever people are puzzling their memories about some flower, I boldly call it a something *spirans*, if it is of the twirligig kind, or else a something *elegans*, or if it is bright-colored, a something *splendens*. My name is instantly adopted, and my wisdom meets with respect. Many other reputations are no better founded. Impudence may always reckon on the ignorance of an audience."

He laughed at this, and then said—

"Am I to presume you know something of Latin, then?"

"About as much as of botany. Papa, you know, is a great scholar, and has tried to teach us all Latin, though with mediocre success. But mind, it is a secret that I know even the little I do. Think of the injury it would do me. Who would waltz with a girl who was known to understand Latin?"

"True, true. Men don't like it. They are proud of their wives or lovers speaking all the continental languages, but a tinge of Latin is pronounced too *blue*. The secret of this male outcry is this: all men are supposed to understand Latin, and very few do; accordingly they resent any attempt to invade their prescriptive superiority. I remember my noble friend Leopardi used to say that only in a woman's mouth could the true beauty of Latin be properly recognized."

"Do you know Leopardi, then?"

"I did know him, poor fellow; but he has been dead these two years. He was a grand creature. Have you read his poems? I have

never before met with any English who had heard of him."

"Read them, no. He is too difficult."

"Difficult?"

"Why, we girls, as you are perhaps aware, are taught to distinguish *sospiri* from *ardiri* and *lagrime* from *affanni*, after which we sing Bellini, and are said to know Italian. But when a poet a little more difficult than Metastasio is placed into our hands, we are at a stand-still."

In this way they chatted merrily enough. Julius was eloquent in his praise of Leopardi, from whom he went to Dante, to Byron, to Bulwer, Scott, and Miss Austen. Rose was delighted to find so many tastes and opinions shared in common with this pleasant young man, and could have sat all night talking to him. She had forgotten his ugliness in the charm of his conversation; but he had not forgotten her beauty, which was shown to greater advantage by the liveliness of her manner.

It was a delicious *tête-à-tête*. One of those accidental enjoyments which from time to time redeem the monotony of soirées, and for the chance of which one consents to be bored through a whole season. Not *what* was said, but *how* it was said, made the talk so delightful. The charm of sympathy, the comfort of finding yourself, as it were, mirrored in the soul of another, the easy, unaffected flow of words dictated by no wish to shine, but simply suggested by the feeling, made Rose and Julius as intimate in that brief period, as if they had known each other many months.

Can not Rose's unwillingness to leave now be appreciated? Can not the reader understand her impatience at having such a *tête-á-tête* disturbed? But there was no help for it. She held out her hand to him with a frankness which almost compensated him for the pain of seeing her depart. He went home and dreamed all night of her.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner, followed by her daughters, sought her husband, who was listening to a humorous narrative given him by Cecil Chamberlayne, of the elopement of the wife of a distinguished professor, with an officer almost young enough to be her son. Meredith Vyner laughed mildly, brushing the grains of snuff from his waistcoat with the back of his hand, and observed:—

"Egad! I always suspected it would end in that way. Such an ill-assorted match! Well, well, as Horace says, you know,

"Felices ter et amplius
Quos . . . ."

Here he was interrupted by the appearance of his wife, who, hurriedly intimating that she felt the rooms too hot, desired him to take her home.

"Directly, my dear, directly," he said, and then turned to Cecil, to finish his quotation.

"Quos irrupta tenet copula, nec malis
Divulsus querimoniis
Suprema citius solvet amor die."

"Good-evening. Now, my dear," offering his arm to his wife, "I am at your service."

"*He* talks of ill-assorted marriages!" said Cecil Chamberlayne to himself, as they left the room.

The ride home was performed in silence. Meredith Vyner was trying to recollect a passage in Horace, which would have enabled him to make a felicitous pun on something Professor Forbes had said to him, and his forgetfulness of which had teased him all the evening. His wife was meditating on the words, looks, and manner of her jilted lover, astonished at his calmness, and alarmed at his threats. The calmness of vehement men is always more terrible than their rage; and the vagueness of Marmaduke's threat made it more formidable, because it suggested a thousand things, and intimated none. "What *would* he do? What *could* he do?"

Rose was thinking of Julius St. John, and her charming *tête-à-tête*. Blanche was weary and sleepy.

Marmaduke, as he jumped into his cab, and drove to the club, reproached himself for having been led away by his anger so far as to threaten. He had put her on her guard, and thereby rendered his vengeance more difficult. It was, indeed, a proof of the violence of his agitation, that he should have so far forgotten himself; and he determined if possible, to recover that false step.

Marmaduke Ashley was one of those

"Children of the sun, whose blood is fire."

and looked upon the treachery of his mistress with very different feelings from those of a calmer-blooded northern. His transports of rage and anguish when he heard of her infidelity almost killed him, and they only settled down into a fierce lust for vengeance. His father dying bequeathed to him a small fortune, which, instead of endeavoring to increase, he brought with him to England, and there awaited, with all the patience of an Indian, the hour when he should be able to wreak full vengeance on her who had humbled his pride, shattered his illusions, and lacerated his heart.

He had formed no plan. Time would, he doubted not, bring forth some opportunity, and for that he waited; enjoying himself meanwhile, as a young man about town, with time on his hands and money in his pocket, best can enjoy himself. He was no moody Zanga, with one fixed idea. He did not go scowling through society like the villain of a tragedy, solacing himself with saturnine monologues, and talking of nothing, thinking of nothing, but of his wrongs and his revenge. Such monomaniacs may exist, but they are rare, and he was not of them. His heart swelled, and his temples throbbed, whenever he thought of his hated mistress, and the thirst for vengeance was not slaked by thinking of it. But this dark spot was only a spot in his life, other thoughts occupied him, other interests attracted him, throwing this quite into the background.

CHAPTER VII

ROSE VYNER WRITES TO FANNY WORSLEY.

Oh! about gayeties, I assure you I have little to tell. We go to very few parties. Mamma says dancing is so frivolous; though I observe she dances all the evening when we do by chance go to a ball. Papa sides with her, and

says *he* can not conceive what pleasure people take in it. Perhaps not; but *we* can! However, we dare not complain, and mamma is so kind to us, that, on the whole, we get on very well, though I long to be in the country. Last Saturday week, we were invited to Dr. Whiston's; a wise place where every one looks like an oracle, where there are few young men, and those generally sickly, fewer nice men, and scarcely any one Blanche and I know to speak to. Mamma likes these sort of places. She is so clever, and manages to talk with all the oracles upon their separate sciences, though she never opens a scientific book from one month to another; but somehow she can dispense with knowledge, and yet contrive that people should believe her deeply read. But then she is so strange! I must interrupt my narrative to tell you something which I can't make out in her. She gets more admiration, in spite of her deformity, than we could ever pretend to; and her style of beauty seems to be exactly what men delight in.

How she manages to persuade us, I don't know, but the result is, we never look well when we go out to a party. This, and our not being overwise, prevents our finding much enjoyment at Dr. Whiston's; so we went on that memorable evening prepared for a yawn. Mamma quickly got us seats, and then sailed about the room talking to her friends. This she does invariably. It is called *chaperoning* Though *what* protection young girls need at such places, and how *this* can be considered as protection, are two things I have not yet comprehended. Well, I seem as if I were never coming to the point, eh? And yet all this preparation is to usher in no adorably handsome young man with bushy whiskers and sleepy eyes, like him we used to see at church when we were at Mrs. Wirrelston's, and when you persuaded me I was in love with that little humpbacked lawyer, in nankeens, who used to ogle us so (do you remember?)—but, on the contrary, to tell you my evening was rendered perfectly delightful by a certain Julius St. John, who sat by my side and chatted away so pleasantly, that my evening fled as rapidly as Cinderella's. And it was his conversation—nothing else; for I declare he was unreasonably hideous.

I am almost ashamed of that last line. Why should I say he was hideous? He wasn't. He was *adorably ugly*. I never cared for beauty, as you know, or you would not have persuaded me into a little sentiment for my nankeened humpback; and it is very foolish in us all to make such a fuss about it: the plainest men are certainly the most agreeable! But, however, it is no use preaching to you on this subject; you who refuse to dance with every man whom you don't think good-looking!

Enough for you to know that my dear, little, ugly man was unaffectedly chatty, and very clever; and, that our conversation was so pleasant, I was quite impatient for yesterday, the second Saturday for which we were invited to Dr. Whiston's,—expecting to see him there and to renew our *tête-à-tête*. I had arranged all sorts of topics. In my mind's eye, I prefigured his animated pleasure at espying me, and then his coming up and securing a seat, and chatting more charmingly than before. Some of my replies were so clever that they astonished me. How brilliantly I *did* talk! How many little scenes of this kind were rehearsed in my imagination, I leave you to guess, if you have ever been impatient for any meeting. They were delicious; but they made the reality only more cruel.

Conceive my disappointment: he was there, yet never came to sit beside me! When first he saw me, his welcome was so warm that it was the realization of what I had expected; but he suffered us to pass on into the last room without once thinking of accompanying us. I was mortified, I confess. I expected to find him as anxious to renew our *tête-à-tête* as myself, and began to be ashamed of having thought so much of him, when it was clear he had not bestowed a thought on me.

We sat in our sullen seats, and looked on in no very amiable mood; that is, I was cross; Blanche, dear creature, had nothing to ruffle her sweet equanimity. It then occurred to me that he would assuredly soon find us out; but he did not. I sat there in vain. The people never before seemed so dull and stupid. The rooms never were so hot. I longed for mamma to fetch us away.

At last he did condescend to approach us and ask us some trivial questions which irritated me so much that I hardly deigned to answer him. He did not seem in the least surprised by my behavior; and that made me angrier. It was quite a relief to me when he turned round to speak to some one and went away.

I don't understand it at all. I suppose I have been making a little fool of myself; yet, in spite of his rudeness—no, not rudeness, but —what shall I call it?—I should like to see him again. His mother has purchased the Grange, so when we are at Wytton, we shall, perhaps, see a good deal of him, and I shall then be able to understand him.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. LANGLEY TURNER AND HER FRIENDS.

While Rose was writing the foregoing letter, Mr. and Mrs. Meredith Vyner were driving toward Eaton-square, on a visit to the well-known, and well-worth-knowing, lively widow, Mrs. Langley Turner.

London society abounds in subjects curious to the observer; and, in spite of its general uniformity, is so split up into opposite and opposing sections, that a painter of manners, whose observation had been confined to a few of those sections, would be accused of ignorance or of caricature by nine-tenths of the English public. This is the reason of the numerous failures in the attempts to describe English society, both by natives and foreigners. To foreigners, indeed, the task must be hopeless. How should they avoid taking their standard of the whole from the circle in which they move? They see the interior of houses where wealth, talent, political influence, and sounding names meet together in habitual and familiar intercourse: how can they imagine that what

they see there are not the acknowledged manners of the "upper classes!" Yet nothing can be more erroneous. Portland-place differs as much from Belgravia, as Regent-street does from Bond-street. What a world is that of Belgravia, and what a variety of worlds within it! Things are there done, and accepted as matters of course, which would make the rest of England incredulously stare; and we may safely affirm that any sketch of English society taken from the pleasant circles of Belgravia, would seem quite as preposterous as any Frenchman's "impressions" of England taken from Leicester-square.

These few remarks were necessary to prevent the reader's indignant rejection of the description of Mrs. Langley Turner as a caricature—as opposed to the whole constitution of English society. And we beg him, therefore, if he have not traveled so far as Pimlico, to retire into his ignorance, and, while staring as much as he pleases, to believe it.

Mrs. Langley Turner's set was one of the small orbs within the greater sphere of Belgravia, and her house was one of the gayest, if not the most exemplary, in it. Her Sunday evenings were celebrated. Her pic-nics, her breakfasts, her snug dinners, and multitudinous parties, were each and all agreeable enough; but the Sunday evening was her *cheval de bataille*—therein she distanced all competitors.

There was something piquant in the audacity of the thing in puritanical England, where, unlike all other Protestant countries, the Sunday is a day on which all amusement, except plethoric dinners, is supposed to be a sin; and, in 1839, such a thing was more unusual than it has since become. This saucy defiance thrown in the face of Puritanism, was joyfully accepted by all those whose residence abroad had made it familiar, as well as by those whose opinions were in favor of a less rigid adherence to a code which other Protestant nations repugned. And though many women went to Mrs. Langley Turner's Sunday evenings, and enjoyed them greatly, yet very few had the courage to imitate her.

Never were pleasanter parties than hers. The rooms were always crowded with pretty women and *somebodies*. Foreigners abounded; literary men and artists of celebrity, Italian singers, travelers, diners out, guardsmen, wits, and roués, formed the heterogeneous and amusing society. People with "slurs" upon their reputation were to be met there; and they were not the least amusing of the set. I know not whether it is that the women whose virtue is not absolutely intact, and the men whose conduct is of the same easy class, are really more amusing and better natured than the incorruptibly virtuous and the sternly conscientious; or that public envy more readily pounces upon any slips, made by the clever, amusing, good-natured people; but the social fact is indisputable, that the pleasantest companions are not always the most "respectable."

Mrs. Langley Turner had a sneaking regard for those black sheep; and Cecil Chamberlayne once laughingly declared, that she never took any notice of a person until his or her reputation had been damaged. "In her paradise," he said, "all the angels will be fallen angels."

With all due allowance for the exaggeration here, certain it is that the truth of the *bon-mot* gave it its success. Every body said it was "*so* good!" And she did not disown it.

"I like people for themselves," she would say; "and, as their virtue does not affect me, so long as I like them and see nothing dishonorable in them, I will open my doors to them."

This un-Britannic audacity of thinking for herself, without reference to the opinion of Mrs. Grundy, and of actually "receiving" women about whom scandal had been busy, very naturally gave scandal a sort of license with her; but it never rose above whispers. Mrs. Langley Turner herself was a prodigious favorite with all classes of men. The wits liked her, she was so lively; the guardsmen, she was "so larky;" the talkers, she was so chatty; the authors, she was so clever, without ink on her thumb, and knew so much of the world; and every body, because she was so quiet and good-natured. A genuine woman; frank, hearty, gossipy, flirty, kind, forgiving—in a word, lovable.

It was to her house that the Vyners were driving, Sunday afternoon being a sort of levée with her. When the Vyners arrived the little drawing-room was tolerably full. First on the sofa, by Mrs. Langley Turner, sat a dowager-countess with her young, handsome, and uninteresting daughter. Opposite them, in an easy chair, sat the broken, gouty, but still charming Sir Frederick Winter; a name celebrated in the annals of gallantry, and one of the now almost extinct species of *roués*, in whom exquisite manner and courtly elegance made vice the very chivalry of vice, so that, in losing all its grossness, it did really seem to lose half its deformity. By his side sat Cecil Chamberlayne, and next to him the pedantic and bony Miss Harridale and her mother; the former seemed to have absorbed the dregs of her ancient family for several generations, so cruelly vulgar was every look and movement. She was talking atrocious French to a bearded dandy, whom Cecil called "some *very* foreign count;" occasionally entrapping young Lord Boodle into the conversation by an appeal to his judgment, which, after smoothing his blonde mustache with the ivory handle of his riding-cane, he reluctantly drawled out.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner, in her very affectionate and sprightly greeting of Mrs. Langley Turner, had time to perceive that Marmaduke, for whom she came, was not there. It was her first appearance in Eaton-square on a Sunday, for Mrs. Meredith Vyner, never missed afternoon service, and nothing but the hope of seeing Marmaduke, whom she was told was a constant visitor, would have induced her to break in thus upon her habits. She comforted herself with the expectation that he might still come.

"Mr. Chamberlayne," said Mrs. Langley Turner, when they were seated, "is giving us an enthusiastic account of a new tragic actress, whom, he says, the Duchesnois, the Dorval, and the Mars—three single ladies rolled into one—would not equal."

"Who is that?" said Mrs. Meredith Vyner, restlessly turning upon Cecil.

"A little Jewess they call Rachel, quite a

girl, picked up from the streets, but an empress on the stage. Till I had seen her I did not believe the human voice capable, in mere speech, of expressing such unutterable sadness, such sobs of woe."

"And you have seen Edmund Kean?"

"Yes, Edmund Kean; but Rachel is something quite incomparable."

"That is true," said the very foreign count; "her acting is not acting."

"No," replied Cecil, "it is *suffering*."

The bony Miss Harridale nodded approval of the epigram, and then informed the company that for her part she saw nothing in French tragedy.

"Surely," said Cecil, "Racine is an exquisite writer."

"No," replied the confident young lady, "he has no *ideas*."

There was something so vague, yet so crushing in this dictum, which was delivered with amazing *aplomb*, that no one replied for a few seconds.

"I fancy," said Sir Frederick Winter, "we are scarcely inclined to do justice to French tragedy, because we always compare it with that which it least resembles—our own."

"For my part, I never *presume* to have an opinion on so delicate a subject," said Mrs. Vyner, who hated Miss Harridale, and never lost an opportunity of saying something disagreeable; "because I feel we English do not understand the language sufficiently to judge of that which depends upon the grace and beauty of language. I do not, of course, mean to imply Miss Harridale in that observation—she is *such* a Frenchwoman!"

Miss Harridale looked daggers, and said, "I do not pretend to feel the graces of Racine, about which they talk so much. I dare say they are all very well. I only speak of the substance: he has no ideas; and what is a poet without profound ideas? I am for ideas, above every thing."

"But how Racine understood the heart—especially woman's heart," said the count. "What insight into the passions! what tenderness! what subtlety! what sublimity!"

"I never saw them," dogmatically pronounced Miss Harridale.

"Then Corneille," added the count; "*le grand Corneille*, there is a genius! Has he not painted Romans?"

"Not to my apprehension," said Cecil. "His Romans are Gascons. The old Horace, for example, who is so much admired, seems to me to have more rhodomontade than grandeur. He is not a man, but a figment!"

Miss Harridale smiled her approbation of this, and declared that the celebrated *qu'il mourût* was not an "idea."

The count, failing to understand that profound objection, asked if she did not regard the *qu'il mourût* as sublime.

"Not at all."

"Well, I suppose I am a heretic," said Meredith Vyner; "but to speak the honest truth, French sublimity always seems to me to fall very wide of the mark."

"Surely not *very*," said Cecil; "only a *step*."

A general laugh greeted this sally, which made Mrs. Vyner remark Cecil, whom she now remembered as the young man Marmaduke spoke to at Dr. Whiston's. She resolved to invite him.

"Is this Rachel—I think you call her—handsome?" asked Lord Boodle, tapping his lips with his cane.

"Yes and no—the beauty of mind."

"The only beauty worthy of the name," said Miss Harridale, sententiously.

It was the only style of beauty to which she could lay claim.

"She is beautiful enough," continued Cecil, "for the parts she plays—you never feel any contradiction between the poet's idea, and her representation of it. You should see her in Phèdre. I think I never can forget the desolation of her utterance of the four grand opening lines; or the fine horror of her '*C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée*;' which, by the way," he added, turning to Vyner, "is only a magnificent paraphrase of what your favorite Horace says in his ode to Glycera—

> "In me tota ruens Venus
> Cyprum deseruit."

Meredith Vyner, who had a high opinion of any man who could quote Horace appositely, suspended a pinch of snuff which he had for some minutes been heaping up between his thumb and forefinger, to assure Cecil that he was perfectly correct in his conjecture, and as no commentator had noticed it, he should certainly do so in his forthcoming edition—"the work of twenty years' labor, sir!" Vyner added, clenching the observation with a sonorous pinch.

In a few seconds, Cecil and Vyner were engaged together upon the nullity of commentators in general, and those on Horace in particular. Talk of contempt! there is no scorn like the scorn of one commentator for another.

Vyner wound up a tirade against Burmann, Dacier, Sanadon, and Bentley, by saying, "If you will do me the pleasure of calling, Mr. Chamberlayne, I will show you my edition, together with some of my marginal corrections. Bentley boasted that he had made eight hundred corrections of the text—sir, I have made more than a thousand in Bentley's edition. You shall see it; it will delight you."

Cecil thought that few things would delight him less, but he was glad to have an invitation to the Vyners' upon any pretext.

During this talk, Miss Harridale was harassing Lord Boodle with her criticisms on modern English literature, which she found deplorably deficient in "ideas."

Mrs. Vyner was paying great court to the old roué, Sir Frederick—his opinion being a verdict.

A knock at the door made her heart beat a little faster. To her disappointment, however, it was only Julius St. John's name she heard announced. She shortly overheard Julius informing Mrs. Langley Turner that he had left Mr. Ashley stretched on his sofa, devouring *Ruy Blas*, just received.

"And I am to be neglected for Victor Hugo, I presume!" said Mrs. Langley Turner.

Julius shrugged his shoulders significantly.

"I shall scold him well for it."

"Not when you hear his excuse. He told me that no attraction could drag him from *Ruy Blas* till he had finished it; it was such a splendid tale of vengeance."

A cold shiver ran over Mrs. Meredith Vyner as she heard St. John carelessly and laughingly let fall those words full of terrible significance to her.

"But he will be here this evening, I hope?" inquired Mrs. Langley Turner.

"Yes."

Finding it was useless waiting any longer, Mrs. Vyner rose to withdraw.

"Do come round this evening, dear," said Mrs. Langley Turner; "only a few friends, and Pellegrini is to give us some recitations from Alfieri—will you?"

"With pleasure."

"That's a dear little woman, I'm so glad."

Meredith Vyner handed Cecil his card, and repeated how glad he should be to show him all his notes on Horace.

"A very clever fellow, that young Mr. Chamberlayne," said Meredith to his wife, as they got into their carriage, "with remarkably sound ideas on the subject of commentators."

"Charming person—so witty. I am glad you gave him your card. By the way, I have said we would go to Mrs. Turner's this evening, to hear Pellegrini recite from Alfieri."

"Very well, my dear," said the astonished Vyner, not venturing to make any further remark on so singular a communication.

It was indeed enough to make him silent. It was something so enormous, so unexpected, that it sounded like a mystification. She had always pretended to be very strict on religious subjects; without affecting fanaticism, she was as rigid as was compatible with her being a woman of the world. This relaxation from her usual rigidity, therefore, was the more surprising, because it seemed motiveless.

Her husband at last thought that the temptation was Pellegrini's recitations. He knew she was a great student of poetry, which she always declared he knew very little about, and had the naïveté to believe, that to hear poetry well recited would be as great a temptation to her, as a new edition of Horace would be to him.

Her motive really was an anxiety to come to an "explanation" with Marmaduke, whose threats terrified her the longer she thought of them. She wished at least to know his game, if she could not look over his cards; and as the sooner she knew that the better for her own defense, she was restless till she had seen him.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO PORTRAITS.

"Look on this picture, and on that."

SHAKSPEARE.

It was no small gratification to Mrs. Meredith Vyner, as, leaning on the arm of her ponderous husband, she glided into Mrs. Langley Turner's rooms that evening, to distinguish among the first group that met her eye, Marmaduke Ashley, resting against the doorway of the second salon, talking to Cecil Chamberlayne and Julius St. John. He was, indeed, a figure not to escape even an indifferent eye. There was lion-like grace about him; a certain indefinable something in his attitudes and movements, which, in their oriental *laisser aller*, were in sharp contrast to the stiffness and artificiality of even the least awkward of our northern dandies. When our young men are careless, they have a slouching, sprawling manner, which is more offensive to the eye than stiffness. It is only the children of warmer climates who can afford to let their limbs fall naturally, and be graceful. Marmaduke, whose prodigious chest and back betokened the strength of a bull, seemed to have united with it the agility of a deer, and was the very model of manly grace.

He was well dressed, without overdress; but he had committed one error in taste, which might, perhaps, be set down to coxcombry, in wearing a white waistcoat, somewhat larger than the fashion permitted. His chest was so expansive, and he was so tall, that this vast expanse of staring white, while it fixed all eyes upon him, made them remark how much too large the chest was for symmetry. It was *trop voyant*, to adopt the jargon of the French dandies. The effect was further increased by his wearing a white cravat, which at that time had only just begun to replace the black, introduced by that puffy potentate, so wittily characterized by Douglas Jerrold as the "most finished gent. in Europe."

How many women sighed for him on that evening, I can not tell; but certain it is, that a shadow of regret fell on Mary's heart as she remarked the beauty of her former lover, and silently compared him with her heavy, snuffy husband. Nor did he gaze on her unmoved. She was a striking figure, and would have been so, even in an assembly of beauties. Perhaps the most striking part about her was her neck and bosom, with the whiteness and firmness of marble—with its coldness too; beautiful it was, and yet repulsive; hard, cold, immodest, unvoluptuous; no blood seemed to beat in its delicate, blue veins—no heart seemed to move its rise and fall; this, the most womanly beauty of a woman, was in her unwomanly; it arrested the eye, without charming it. There was something about her whole appearance which was singularly fantastic: her golden hair, drooping in ringlets to her waist, and her dazzling skin and tiny figure gave her the appearance of a little fairy; nor did her deformity destroy this impression. She was so pretty, or rather so *piquante*, and unlike other women, that her crooked shoulder only gave a piquancy the more by the sort of compassionate feeling it raised. "What a pity such a sweet creature should be deformed!" was the universal exclamation; and this very exclamation made people think more of the charms which redeemed that deformity.

In truth, the great deformity was not in the back—it never is—but in the eyes and mouth. Theoretically, we may all declaim against faults of proportion and of outline, but, practically, it is the eyes and mouth that carry the day: according as they look and they smile, do we feel that people are beautiful or ugly; because in them lies the expression of the heart and soul. This I take to be the secret of those astounding differences in taste upon a subject of which there is a distinct standard—beauty. True, there is a standard of form and color. We are all agreed upon the face that would make the handsomest picture; but the best part of beauty

is that which the painter can never express, because he is condemned to one expression; and the beauty of the loving heart and noble soul is visible in the changing luster of a thousand smiles and glances. Now, although we might all agree that a certain face has exquisite purity of outline, and gratifies the æsthetical sense of proportion, yet we should feel and say that some less perfect face has charmed us more. Why?—because we are indifferent to perfection! No: but because in some less harmoniously proportioned face we have read a more lovable soul—a soul with which we can better enter into communion. Thus it is that men get distractedly enamored of women, whose beauty is more than problematical, because without having had many opportunities of knowing their characters, but mostly from what the faces express, they read there the signs of unalterable goodness and lovingness, of high nobility of soul, or, perhaps, only of some voluptuous and passionate tendencies; and all these are qualities more fascinating than purity of outline. In support of my argument, let me mention the fact, that the women most celebrated as beauties have seldom, if ever, been picture-beauties. It is impossible, from any picture of Mary Queen of Scots, for example, to imagine wherein lay the enchantment of her beauty.

Therefore, my ill-favored reader, take courage; if your mind is honest, and your heart loving, you will have true beauty—yes, the positive effect of beauty on all those who can read the signs of honesty and loveliness.

These signs were not legible in the eyes and mouth of Mrs. Meredith Vyner; and there, as I said, lay her real deformity, though people did not call it so. Those light, gray eyes, so destitute of voluptuousness, but so full of light—so cunning, so cruel, so uncomfortable to look upon—and that small mouth, with its thin, irritable, selfish lips, which a perpetual smile endeavored to make amiable, created a far more repulsive impression, when first you saw her, than any hump could have created; and yet she fancied that her hump was her only deformity.

She was, as I said, repulsive at first sight; but most people got over that impression after a while, as they generally do when familiarity has blunted their perceptions. It was not necessary to be a great physiognomist to see at once the nature of the soul her eyes expressed; and yet, when people heard her amiable sentiments, and noticed the meekness of her manner, they yielded to the popular sophism of its being "unjust to judge from first impressions," and they believed in her *professions* rather than in her *expressions*—that is, in her calculated utterances rather than her instinctive and unconquerable emotions.

"But," objects the reader, "first impressions are so often false, that it would be madness to rely on them. I answer: first impressions—at least those of a broad and simple kind—are rarely, if ever, false, though often *incomplete*. The observer should not rely on them; but he should never absolutely reject them. They may be modified—greatly modified—but not contradicted. Human character is marvelously complex, and this very complexity serves to confound the observer, if he have not a clew; and that clew is best attained on a first interview, because then the perceptions are least biased by the opinions. If he understand human nature, he will soon be able to modify his first impressions, and complete the general outline of a character.

Physiognomy is very fallacious, I know, in its details; but in its broad principles, which almost all human beings instinctively employ, there is no more infallible guide. The mistake physiognomists commit is in not leaving sufficient margin for education. A man may have cruelty or bad temper very legible in his face, and yet not in his acts be cruel or bad-tempered; but if you interrogate his boyhood, you will find that, however he may have subdued the demon within him, he once had the quality which his face expresses, and, in the depths of his nature, he has it still: the wild beast lies chained within him, but may at any time break loose.

If physiognomy betrays us into rash judgments, far more erroneous are those into which we are betrayed by an observation of conduct or of speech, if we have not previously a clew to the character; because it is a tendency in us all to attribute importance only to important acts—only to great occasions, when, as we say, a man's true nature is called forth. Nothing can be more false—trifles are the things by which men are to be judged. If we would know them *as they are*, we should observe them in their unguarded moments, in the routine of daily and familiar life, when no man's eyes, as it were, are on them. If we would know them *as they wish to be considered*, then we may observe them when the importance of the occasion turns men's eyes upon them. Taking the most liberal view of the question, one can only say that great occasions show what men are capable of in extraordinary circumstances—not what the men are.

I am tempted to quote the remarkable words of a remarkable writer on this very point: "In our judgment of men," says Henry Taylor, "we are to beware of giving any importance to occasional acts. By acts of occasional virtue weak men endeavor to redeem themselves in their own estimation, vain men endeavor to exalt themselves in that of mankind. It may be observed, that there are no men more worthless and selfish, in the general tenor of their lives, than some who from time to time perform feats of generosity. Sentimental selfishness will commonly vary its indulgences in this way, and vain-glorious selfishness will break out into acts of munificence. But self-government and self-denial are not to be relied on for any real strength, except in so far as they are found to be exercised in detail."*

The first impression Mrs. Meredith Vyner made, was that of a cold, cunning, cruel woman; with plenty of nervous energy and sensibility, but no affection. If you disregarded that, and attended only to her conduct, and to the sentiments she generally expressed, you thought her an enthusiastic, affectionate, childlike creature, whose very faults sprang from an excess of warmth and impulsiveness; and so good me dis-

* "The Statesman."

actress was she, that it required a keen observer, or a long intimacy with her, to detect her real character.

It has been remarked that deformed people are singularly noble, delicate, and generous in their natures; or singularly mean, cunning, and malicious. The scorn of the world so powerfully influences them, that it brings out into greater relief the features of that moral physiognomy with which nature has endowed them, making them much better or much worse than their fellows. Mrs. Meredith Vyner belonged to the latter class; but so cunning was she, that most people were entirely deceived by her; and if they were occasionally startled by some great contradiction, they got over it with the usual remark, "Oh, she is such a very strange woman!"

CHAPTER X.

DECLARATION OF WAR.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner had not long been in the room before she had spoken to Marmaduke, who, perfectly on his guard, replied with respectful politeness to the observations she from time to time addressed to him. It was impossible for the acutest observer to have suspected there was any *arrière pensée* in her slightly flurried manner (she was always restless), or in his dignified ease. Two gladiators in the arena never faced each other with greater watchfulness, than this tiny, lively woman—confident in her skill—and this self-possessed, magnificent Brazilian.

Pellegrini placed himself with his back to the fire and coughed as he thrust one hand into his breast, previously to beginning his recitations. The guests crowded from the other rooms, and disposed themselves to listen, as if they were to understand and greatly relish Alfieri. Mrs. Vyner, taking advantage of this movement, beckoned Marmaduke to follow her, and seating herself at a small table in the inner room, began turning over the leaves of the Keepsake, and then addressing him in an under tone, said—

"So you wanted to cut me the other night?"

"I did. Surely it was the best thing I could do." As he said this, he sat down on an ottoman opposite her.

"What! before any explanation?" she inquired, endeavoring to throw a tenderness into her tone, which she could not throw into her eyes.

"All explanation is useless when the facts are so eloquent. I neither ask for explanation, nor would I accept one."

"And you think me—" She could not proceed.

"A woman," he said, gravely.

"And what motives do you attribute?"

"Very natural and powerful motives, or they would not have influenced you. I know not what they were. I do not desire to know. Either you love me—"

"Mr. Ashley, remember I am a married woman, and this language—"

"I was only putting an hypothetical case: [illegible]ir conduct and the present interruption con[illegible]e me it was unnecessary to put such a case."

He rose, but she motioned to him to be reseated. She sighed, and continued hurriedly turning over the leaves of the book she held. Expecting every moment that she was going to speak, he watched her in silence. This was exactly what she wished; confident in the influence of her beauty over him, she thought it more effective than any argument: besides, it did not inculpate her in any way.

She miscalculated. The contemplation only served to irritate him the more. If his temples throbbed at the mere recollection of her having jilted him, the sight of her called up bygone scenes of tenderness, which made her inconstancy the more odious.

"Do you not hate me?" she said at last, keeping her eyes fixed on the book, not daring to look at him.

"I do," he replied, in a whisper, like the hiss of a serpent.

She started at the sound, and raised her terrified head to see if his face contradicted or confirmed the words. But she could read nothing there. The light which for a moment had flashed from his dark eyes had passed away, like the flush which had burned his cheek. He had been unable to repress that movement of anger; but no sooner were the words escaped, than he repented them, and endeavored to do away with their effect, by adding—

"That is, I *did*; now hate has given place to contempt. When I hated you, it was because I still felt a lingering of that love which you had outraged; but I soon overcame that weakness, and now I think only of you as one who *sold herself for money*."

At this very bitter speech, made the more galling from the tone of superb contempt in which it was uttered, she shook back her golden ringlets, and bent on him her tiger eyes, with an expression which would have made most men tremble, but which to Marmaduke had a savage fascination, stirring strange feelings within him, and making him almost clutch her in a fierce embrace. She looked perfectly lovely in his eyes at that moment; and it is impossible to say what might have been the result of this scene, had not her husband appeared. He had just missed her, and astonished at not finding her listening to Pellegrini's recitations, for which alone he supposed her to have come there, he began fidgeting about, till he espied her in earnest conversation with the handsome Marmaduke.

"My dear," said he, preparing a pinch with slow dignity, "won't you come into the next room, to hear Alfieri?"

"No; I came away, unable to listen to Pellegrini's affected declamation."

Meredith Vyner stood there somewhat puzzled what to say. He flattened his nose with a series of gentle taps, and in his abstraction, let fall more of the snuff than usual. Not even his pinch, however, could clear his ideas. He felt something like jealousy, though the handsome young man was a perfect stranger to him; and wished to get his wife away, without exactly knowing how it was to be done.

He was relieved from his perplexity by an influx of the company from the other room at the conclusion of the recitation. The *tête-à-tête* was broken up. Mrs. Vyner took her husband's

arm, and moved away, not without a parting smile at Marmaduke, who received it with supreme indifference.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE OF OUR HEROES.

On the following morning, Cecil Chamberlayne was busy over his edition of Horace, "cramming" for his interview with Meredith Vyner, whose acquaintance he was the more anxious to cultivate, now he knew that he had three marriageable daughters.

Cecil has been introduced once or twice before, but I have not yet had an opportunity of sketching his portrait, so let me attempt it now.

He was a social favorite. He had considerable vivacity, which sometimes amounted to wit, and always passed for it. He drew well, composed well, sang well, dressed well, rode well, wrote charming verses and agreeable prose, played the piano and the guitar, and waltzed to perfection: in a word, was a *cavalier accompli*.

But with all these accomplishments there was no genius. He could do many things well, but nothing like a master. He painted better than an amateur, but not well enough for a professed artist.

Indeed, there was in him, both physically and morally, a sort of faltering greatness which arrested the attention of the observer. The head and bust were those of a large man, but the body and legs were small and neatly made. In his face there was the same contradiction: a boldness of outline, with a delicacy amounting to weakness in the details. His brow was broad and high, without being massive. His eyes were blue and gentle. His nose aquiline, and handsomely cut. The mouth would have been pretty, had it not been too small. In appearance he was somewhat over-neat—dapper.

At school the boys called him "Fanny."

It is not often that the physical corresponds so well with the moral, as in Cecil Chamberlayne; but in him the accordance was perfect. You could not look at his white hand without at once divining, from its conical fingers, and the absence of strongly marked knuckles, that it belonged to one in whom the emotions predominated, and in whom the intellect tended naturally to art; it was, in truth, an artistic hand, the largeness of which showed a love of details, as the broad palm and small thumb showed an energetic sensuality and a wavering will.

Lively, good-natured, and accomplished, he was a great favorite with most people, and, indeed, the very attractiveness of his manners had been the obstacle to his advancement in life. His time and talents, instead of being devoted to any honorable or useful pursuit, were frittered away in the endless nothings which society demanded, and he had reached the age of seven-and-twenty, without fortune, and without a profession. He flattered himself that he should be made consul somewhere, by one among his powerful friends, or that some sinecure would fall in his way; and on this hope he refrained from applying himself to the study of any profession, and only thought of sustaining his reputation as an amusing fellow. Meanwhile his small patrimony had dwindled down to the interest of four thousand pounds, which was preserved only because he could not touch the capital: a misfortune which he had frequently declaimed against, and to which he now owed the means of keeping a decent coat on his back.

He went to Vyner, listened to his remarks on Horace, sympathized with his hatred of editors, wondered at the beauty and rarity of his editions, expressed strong and lively interest in his commentary, and, in short, so ingratiated himself with the old pedant, that he was invited down to Wytton Hall, whither the family was about to go.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

CECIL CHAMBERLAYNE TO FRANK FORRESTER.

My dear Frank.

I am alone in this house; every body is gone somewhere, except that prosy, respectable gentleman, Captain Heath, who is in the library, reading Seneca, or Hannah More, I dare say; and in consequence of this solitude, I obey the call of friendship, and devote my unoccupied time to you.

I have been here three days without a yawn. That is enough to tell you how different the place is from what I expected. On the other hand, I must confide to you my suspicions, that I shall return to town perfectly heart-whole. There are only the two elder girls at home; and, though very pretty, they are not at all my style. Rose, the eldest, is satirical, and far too lively to get up any sentiment with. She makes the place ring with her merry, musical laugh; but I never get on with laughing women. Her sister Blanche is better; but she is shy, and, I suspect, stupid. Violet, the youngest, is expected home in a few days; but both her father and step-mother give fearful accounts of her temper; and, without making any positive charge, Mrs. Vyner has, from time to time, said things which convey a very unfavorable impression of the girl's disposition.

As this is the case, I must look at Wytton Hall from a totally different point of view. It is now only a country-house to me, and I must criticise its attractions accordingly.

My first impression was any thing but favorable. I arrived here about half-past six, and was received by—the butler. He showed me to my room in silence, and I did not feel dis-

posed to question him. As he asked me whether I wanted any thing, I inquired after the dinner-hour.

"Dinner will be ready, sir, as soon as you are dressed," he replied, and left me.

The house seemed very quiet, but I dressed myself with care, all the time speculating on the cause of my singular reception, or, rather, non-reception. By the time I was ready, I had made up my mind that every body must have been dressing for dinner on my arrival, and that perhaps I had been keeping them waiting half an hour.

I rang, and the servant lighted me down a complicated course of corridors and oak staircases; very somber, very *rococo*, but very superb. The wind shook mysterious tapestries. Banners drooped by the side of complete sets of steel armor, looking like prodigiously uncomfortable knights, stiff as steel and the middle ages could make them. Formidable griffins of finely-carved oak glared at me, with heraldic fury from the balustrades; and endless ancestors, of unheard of bravery and incorruptibility, looked stiffly at me from their dim canvas; each and all haughtily eyeing me, as if my intrusion on the scene was one of the inexplicable facts of modern progress. In short, I could have fancied myself in a *Castle of Otranto* some centuries ago, instead of in a gentleman's country house in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and forty. And I assure you, as the solemn flunky strode before me, his candle throwing but a dubious light amidst all this somber splendor, I felt quite romantic, and should not have started if, in some gusty movement, the tapestry had opened, and one of the faded-visaged, ferocious ancestors had stepped from his frame.

At length I reached the dining-room: there the silent butler condescended to explain to me that the family and visitors were all out at a pic-nic. I was to dine by myself. And never did I sit down to a stranger or more uncomfortable dinner. You know the dinner hour is the period at which I shine; my best stories are inspired by the cheerful scene, the lights, the clatter of glasses, and the sparkle of the champagne. It is then I feel myself possessed of all my faculties. Well, then, fancy me seated at a solitary, silent meal, without even the advantages of solitude and silence. The vast saloon, with its carved oak-pannels, its high and vaulted roof, its heavy antique furniture, required all its three chandeliers to be properly lighted; instead of which, a massive candelabra threw light just on the table and its immediate neighborhood, but left the greater part of the room in deep obscurity. In this Rembrandtish picture, which I could have painted with greater gusto had it not disagreeably affected me, you are to fancy me in the light silently eating, and in the surrounding shadows two silent flunkies, silently bringing and taking away the various dishes which represented dinner; as if dinner consisted solely in eating.

You often laugh at me, Frank, for my gourmandism—and you, too, such a perfect gourmand—but if you had seen me on that occasion, you would have credited my fundamental maxim, which Brillat Savarin has omitted in his *Physiologié du Gout*, viz., What the *chef de cuisine* is to the raw material, that is the company to the *chef de cuisine*.

I never ate less, nor with such profound contempt for the process of eating, reduced to the mere satisfaction of hunger. Besides, the somberness and silence of the scene oppressed me.

I was shown into the drawing-room; a handsome, well lighted, comfortable-looking place which quite cheered me. A log was blazing joyously in the fire-place, for the autumnal nights down here are keen; and, altogether, the contrast with the dark, grandiose, majestically uncomfortable dining-room, made this drawing-room delightful.

I threw myself on an ottoman, and tried to amuse myself with a book; but you know, I dare say, how impossible it is to read in such uncertain moments. Expecting the family to arrive every minute, it was in vain I tried to fix my interest in any thing I read.

I threw down the book, and gazed thoughtfully at the crackling log. The wind sighed mournfully without, the clock on the mantlepiece ticked with a sort of lively monotony, the embers fell with a cozy, familiar sound, and I sank into one of those exquisite reveries wherein the past is curiously enwoven with the future, and, treading the imaginary stage, we play such brilliant parts.

I must have passed from these waking dreams into dreams of a less coherent kind, and have fallen asleep, for I was aroused by the barking of a dog, and noise of considerable bustle in the hall, which was quickly followed by the entrance of Meredith Vyner, his wife, his daughters, and his guests. He apologized for being absent on my arrival, but had accepted the engagement before my note reached him to say I should be down on that day. His welcome was warm enough; but the others seemed to me disagreeably cold and constrained. They were all very tired, and went early to bed except Vyner, who sat up with me discussing Horace; and Captain Heath, who was reading the paper.

I retired to bed somewhat disgusted, and resolved to receive a letter which should call me up to town on urgent business; I felt so lonely in that great house full of uncongenial people. Sleeping in a strange house is always rather unpleasant to me. I am bothered by unfamiliarity in familiar things. I could sleep in a wigwam comfortably enough; but in a bed-room which is substantially the same as all other bed-rooms, and which, nevertheless wears an air of strangeness, I feel out of my *assiette ordinaire*. This was peculiarly so on the night I speak of, from my unpleasant impression of the people I was thrown among.

It happened, however, that my impression of the people was similar to my impression of the place—at first repulsive, afterward attractive. What the well-lighted drawing-room was to the dining-room, that was the next morning's hilarity to the over-night's frigidity. Breakfast was charming. Every body seemed in high spirits—the first freshness of morning—and my opinion was completely changed. You know how intimate one becomes after having spent a night under the same roof; it seems as if you breakfasted only with old friends. I felt myself at home; and kept the table in a roar

of laughter. This success operated favorably on my own spirits; and in consequence, I have established myself as a general favorite.

Now for my companions:—Vyner himself promises to be more of a bore than I anticipated. His wife is very charming, and seems to agree wonderfully in all my views, which I, of course, regard as a sign of excellent taste and judgment. The daughters I have already spoken of. Captain Heath is handsome, gentlemanly, but confoundedly "sensible," and, though a guardsman, has no idea of "life." I can't say I like him; though *why*, I don't know; as Martial says,

> Non amo te Sabidi: nec possum dicere quare;
> Hoc tantum possum dicere: Non amo te.

(I hope you remember enough Latin to understand that, eh, eh, Frank? The truth is, I charmed Vyner yesterday with it, by quoting it as the original of "I do not love thee, Dr. Fell," which he quoted to me. He was so pleased, that I would wager he introduces it into his commentary on Horace, which already amounts to nearly three octavos!)

To return to Heath, I think something of my dislike may be the mere reaction against the immense liking, I almost said veneration, which every one feels for him here. They are always telling some story of his goodness. "Goodness!" and in a guardsman!

Mrs. Langley Turner, who arrived yesterday, Sir Harry Johnstone, and Tom Wincot, I need not describe to you. But there is a young fellow named Lufton who ought to be under your hands; he would be an admirable fellow if "formed." To convey to you his stupendous innocence, he told me yesterday at billiards, when I asked him what was his usual stake, that "he had never played for money." Is not this something fabulous—a myth? Let me add, however, that he had enough *savoir vivre* to propose that I should name the stakes, as he was quite willing to do what I did. That reestablished him in my opinion. He won a pony from me, which I am not likely to regain, as he plays decidedly better than I do.

I must also not forget George Maxwell, a saturnine, stupid, fanatical individual, in love with Mrs. Vyner, or I am vastly mistaken, savagely jealous of every one she noticès, but by no means rewarded by any notice from her.

I can't tell whether she observes his passion; but she certainly does not return it. Nobody likes *him*.

There are, besides, a merry little widow, a Mrs. Broughton, and her niece, an inoffensive girl, with a happy, simpering visage, radiant with foolishness.

This is our party: rather mixed, but very agreeable. I can't tell you now how we pass our time, for here am I at the end of my paper and patience. Good-by, Frank.

Ever yours, CECIL.

CHAPTER II.

ROSE TO FANNY WORSLEY.

NEWS, my dearest Fanny—news is an article as rare with us as with the morning papers. We see nobody, hear nothing, do nothing, but amuse ourselves as we best can, and that is not adapted to a letter, it would require such endless explanations.

In answer to your first question, Yes; Julius is here, or rather, he is with his mother at the Grange, and very frequently walks over. As to his being my slave, don't think it! He is evidently not indifferent to me, but as evidently not in love. The vainest of our sex (are we so vain?) in my place, could not imagine him in love. I'm rather glad of it, for I certainly *don't* love *him*, and should be sorry to lose a *friend*.

But let me tell you of another new acquaintance in the *jeune premier* line—a Mr. Cecil Chamberlayne, whom papa has invited here for a week. He is handsome, witty, good-natured, and clever—all very excellent qualities; but there is a levity about him which somewhat disturbs my liking for him. I could never fancy myself sentimental with him for a moment. His gayety makes me laugh, but does not, somehow, make me gay. Every body sides against me here, except Captain Heath, who says he feels as I do in that respect. They all swear by Mr. Chamberlayne; but to my taste, Julius St. John's gayety is far more exhilarating, perhaps, because it is tempered with a manly seriousness; you feel that his laugh is as *hearty* (in the real primitive sense of the word) as his earnestness is sincere.

Violet is to be home at the end of this week. Papa has written for her, as mamma says that she is only being spoiled at my uncle's. The real secret is, I believe, that mamma has heard how Violet speaks of her down in Worcestershire, and that the character there given of her comes up to London. Now, though Violet is, I believe, unjust to mamma, yet people are only too willing, as mamma says, to believe every thing ill of a step-mother. I fear Violet won't be comfortable. Suppose Julius St. John should fall in love with her? It would be a capital match. They would suit so well: I should like it above all things.

I am reading Leopardi's poems; they are very beautiful, and very mournful. Julius St. John says that they are the finest productions of modern Italy. By the way, though you will accuse me of filling my letter with Julius, I must tell you of something that occurred *apropos* of Leopardi:—the first evening I met him—it was at Dr. Whiston's, and I wrote you a long account of it—he spoke to me of Leopardi, whom I had not heard so highly praised before. Papa had brought a copy with him from Italy, and I had looked into it from curiosity, but finding it difficult to read, my Italian being some what flimsy, I took no further trouble with it, till Julius spoke so enthusiastically about him. I then set doggedly to work, and mastered the poems; having done so I read them over again with great pleasure, and am now a sworn admirer of this strange, unhappy being.

Well, one evening, shortly after we had come down here, Julius took up my copy of Leopardi, which happened to be lying on the table. It was penciled all over. He asked whose marks those were. I told him mine. "You seem to have been a careful reader," he said. "Your praises," I replied, "taught me to be."

He looked up for a moment, to read in one full, rapid gaze, the expression of my counte-

nance, and then dropped his eyes once more upon the book, but not before I had noticed that his cheek was flushed. Whether in anger or in pleasure I know not, for his eyes are so shadowed by his dark, straight eyebrows, which meet across the nose, that it is only in certain aspects you can read what is passing in them. What there could be in my reply either to anger or to please him, I can not guess; but he changed the subject, and I could not interrogate him, as mamma came up at that moment, nor have I dared since. All I can say is, that if he was angry he has quite forgotten it; and if he was pleased he is perfectly ungrateful.

This little incident is all I have to relate. Imagine what our life must be when that is an incident; and yet, as Julius says, "it is not events but emotions which make life important; and events are only prized inasmuch as they excite emotions."

Your affectionate friend,

Rose Vyner.

P.S.—Now, don't you *misinterpret* a fact which strikes me in reading this letter over, namely, that one name occurs very frequently. It is purely owing to the want of any subject to write about. Don't imagine it otherwise.

CHAPTER III.

CECIL IS SMITTEN.

My Dear Frank.

Your complaint respecting the omissions of my letter was not very generous, considering the length of the aforesaid letter. However, I will now tell you what I didn't tell you then—that there is endless fishing and famous preserves; so you may cultivate Vyner with perfect safety, though excuse me if I doubt your success.

The hall is, as I told you, formidably *rococo*, or rather *moyen age;* but handsome of the kind, and spacious. The Italian terrace in front of the house has the trim beauty of such things, but is spoiled by a want of "keeping;" the balustrades are *griffinesque*, and yet there are copies of the Greek statues in the garden!

A rich embowering shrubbery leads you down to the river, which brawls through the property; beyond, on the other side, there is a lovely wood, which skirts the banks of the river, and affords a most romantic promenade. I should have certainly been most poetically touched the first day I went there, had it not been for the saucy merriment of that liveliest of girls, Rose; but she drove all seriousness out of me. I could have kissed her ruddy lips to close them, and put a stop to her merciless merriment. I have since visited the wood alone, but one can not be sentimental alone—at least I can not. The river runs through rich meadows, on which the sleek cattle browse in philosophic calmness; it forms an endless source of amusement. I have sat for hours in the boat gently dropping down the stream, lulled by the soft ripple, and yielding myself to dreamy listlessness. The broad leaves of the water-lily that float upon the stream supporting the delicate-shaped yellow flower, and the rich colors of the luxuriant loosestrife and other wild flowers, whose names I know not, together with the windings of the river, and its undulating meadows on one side, and many-tinted wood on the other, make up a picture of which I can not tire.

But the charms of this place are nothing to those of one of its inmates, about whom I will now endeavor to convey my impressions. If they are somewhat confused, attribute it to the effect of an apparation, which has left me very little command over my ideas.

I told you that the youngest daughter was expected to arrive. I had consented to prolong my stay another week, and was not sorry to have an opportunity of judging for myself. It happened that one morning before breakfast I was looking over the paper, waiting, with that intolerance which only hungry men can appreciate, till the others should descend; when in bounded a magnificent Scotch deer-hound, who sprang over the chairs and sofas, in a riotous manner, and came up to me, thrusting his shaggy head in my hand to be caressed.

"Down, Shot, down!" exclaimed a sweetly imperative voice.

I looked up, and surely never did mortal eyes behold a more bewitching apparition. A young girl of more than ordinary height, dressed in a blue riding-habit, which set off the budding beauty of a graceful figure, stood before me. She wore a black straw hat, whose broad brim sheltered her face from the sun, and which, with a simple blue ribbon, made a head-dress ten times more picturesque and becoming than the odious man's hat which Amazons put on; from under it escaped ringlets of dark brown hair, tipped with a golden hue. Her brow was low, but broad—perhaps too massive for beauty. Her eyes large, long, almond-shaped, and inconceivably lustrous—the sort of eye which *looks you down*, which, even if you meet its gaze in passing, seems to project such indomitable will and energy, that involuntarily you avert your glance. I am not easily stared out of countenance, and am rather apt to look *into* women's eyes, but I find myself unable to withstand Violet's gaze—for you must have already divined that my apparition was Violet Vyner. Do not, however, suppose that because all eyes droop beneath the intolerable lustre of her glance, that she is otherwise than bewitching. Her eyes are not fierce; though doubtless they could be. It is the astonishing energy and imperious will which look out at you, and make you feel your inferiority. And this effect is heightened by a certain impetuous haughtiness of demeanor which I never observed before. Haughtiness generally implies coldness, reserve, restraint. But in Violet, although the haughtiness is unmistakable, the fire and passion are still more so. With the airs and carriage of the most imperial of her sex, she unites an appearance of *abandon*, of impetuosity, of lofty passion, which belongs more to the southern women than to any I have before seen in England. To complete my feeble sketch, let me add that her nose is a trifle too large and aquiline, her mouth also too large, though handsomely cut, her complexion of that luminous brown which Titian so well knew how to paint, and the form of her face a perfect oval. Handsomer women may be seen every day in the park, or at the opera; but a woman with more character in her face—a

woman more irresistibly fascinating, I never saw. Critically, there are many defects; but, taken in the *ensemble*, they only seem to heighten the one effect of a queenly beauty, half sad, half voluptuous.

I rose as she entered, but was so absorbed by her beauty that I stood gaping at her like a cockney at a covey of partridges, suddenly whirring up before him.

She bowed quietly, I thought haughtily, and did not even pay me the compliment of a little embarrassment. I recovered from my surprise, and ventured on a common-place about the weather. She had already been out for a morning scamper; and we soon got upon the subject of horses and hunting, which she understood a great deal better than I did. Her attention was, however, soon diverted to her dog.

"Down, Shot; down, sir! Do you hear me? Down!" she said.

The hound was at this moment resting his fore paws on the table, and taking an inquiring survey of the books and flowers on it. Disregarding the command of his mistress, he continued to twitch his nose interrogatively, till a smart cut from the riding whip she held in her hand made him spring away with a howl; and then, obedient to a gesture of command, he came and crouched at her feet.

This little incident disagreeably affected me. I am rather tender-hearted, and particularly fond of dogs; so that to see one beaten by any body is extremely unpleasant to me, but by a woman—a young and lovely woman—it is odious. Besides, I thought the punishment needlessly severe. She seemed quite unconscious of having done any thing out of the way, and continued a lively conversation with me on dogs and animals in general, all the time caressing Shot, who remained at her side; and in this conversation displaying a love for animals, which rendered her recent act of severity more wanton in my eyes.

I have since found out that she is any thing but cruel; but upon the principle of spare the rod and spoil the dog, she exacts implicit obedience. It gives her as much pain to correct her animals as it does a mother to punish her children; but, like a courageous mother, she knows it is to save them from more pain and sorrow, and, therefore, unhesitatingly punishes them.

To tell you that I am fast falling over head and ears in love with this adorable creature will be only to tell you what my description must have betrayed. To tell you that she seems no less inclined to follow my example will be more like news. We generally ride together; we sing duets, and our voices harmonize charmingly; in a word, young Lufton has begun to joke me about her.

Unfortunately, my visit draws to a close, and unless I can make a tolerably deep impression before I leave, she will have forgotten me by next season. She is only sixteen, but, to look at her, you would say she was twenty, and to talk to her you would say much more. She is one of the precocious, and has been bred up in a queer way. Adieu! We shall meet at the club next week.

P.S.—I open this to tell you that they will not part with me here, and that I have promised to remain till the shooting begins, though I told them I had no longer any pleasure in shooting. But I was too happy for any excuse to remain under the same roof with the enchanting Violet.

CHAPTER IV.

CECIL EXHIBITS HIMSELF.

The three letters, just given, will save me a great deal of explanation and description; and, as the horses are at the door, we have no time to waste.

Mrs. Langley Turner, Sir Harry Johnstone, young Lufton, Cecil, and Violet are preparing to ride out, and afterward to lunch at the Grange.

Cecil rode remarkably well, and was proud of it; besides, he looked handsomer on horseback, as then his head and bust were seen to full advantage, of which he was also aware; and Violet, who had of late been accustomed to follow the hounds, and spend the greater part of every day on horseback, looked upon him with fresh admiration, as she marked the graceful mastery of his bearing. With a more than womanly contempt for effeminate men, she had at first imagined Cecil one, from the delicacy and dapperness she noticed in him. But finding that he was an excellent shot with the rifle, that he even excelled her with pistols, that he fenced well, and rode boldly, she gave him her esteem, and was nearly giving him her heart—but that was not gone, as yet. She was charmed with Cecil's manner—she admired him, and saw his admiration for her; but she loved him not, as yet, however fast she might be galloping on the road to it.

Off they started, Shot barking and leaping up at the nose of his playfellow, Violet's bay mare, Jessy, while a sedater hound trotted slowly behind. Mrs. Langley Turner, Sir Harry, and Lufton rode abreast, discussing the proposition which had just been started, of getting up private theatricals at the Hall. Violet and Cecil followed, talking of favorite books and favorite composers, comparing sentiments, and looking into each other's handsome faces, suffused with the bright flush of excitement.

"Here we are at the Grange," said Violet, as they cantered within sight of the lodge gates.

"Alas, yes!" replied Cecil.

He sighed at the thought of his delicious *tête-à-tête* being broken up; and, though he consoled himself with the idea that, since he was to remain at the Hall, many other opportunities must occur, yet he knew by experience that there is no such thing as the repetition of a scene in which emotion plays the principal part. You can not command such things—they spring out of the moment; they are dependent upon a thousand circumstances, over which you have no control. The mood of mind, the state of the atmosphere, the accident of association—all concur in investing some ordinary occasion with a magic charm, which may never be felt again. "I was a fool not to have declared myself—she would certainly have accepted me," he said to himself, as he dismounted, and passed into the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. St. John,

Julius, the clergyman's wife, and Marmaduke Ashley, who had just come down on a visit at the Grange. Maxwell, with Mr. and Mrs. Meredith Vyner, arrived shortly afterward, and the whole party sat down to a merry luncheon.

"I'm delighted to learn that you are going to prolong your stay down here, Mr. Chamberlayne," said Julius St. John; "and hope you will not confine your shooting to Wytton. The Grange, they tell me, is famous for its game."

"You are very kind," replied Cecil; "but I shall scarcely avail myself of your offer. I am no sportsman."

Violet, turning suddenly round upon him, with a look of incredulity, said—

"No sportsman? and such an excellent shot!"

"Don't confess it before her," said Vyner, laughing; "or you will be lost in her estimation. She is a true descendant of Diana; and, like her mythic ancestress—

Sævis inimica Virgo
Belluis. . . . ."

"I'm grieved, indeed!" replied Cecil; "but treat me as a cockney; shower contempt upon me for the confession; but, the truth is, I never found much pleasure in any sport, except hunting; and the little pleasure I used to find in shooting was destroyed five years ago."

"How was that?"

"The anecdote is almost childish, but I am not such a child as to be ashamed of relating it. I was one day rambling over the wood at Rushfield Park, with my rifle in my hand, tired of shooting at a mark. There started a hare at a tempting distance from me, I fired. A slight appearance of ruffled fur alone told me that he was hit. He ran leisurely away, and described a circle round me, till approaching within a few paces, he lay meekly down, and died. I know not wherefore, but the death of this hare was indescribably touching to me. It was not the mere death: I had killed hundreds before, and often had to dispatch by a blow those only wounded. But this one had died so meekly, without a cry, without a struggle, and had come to die so piteously at the feet of him who had shot it, that I took a sudden disgust to the sport, and have never fired a gun since at either hare or partridge.

There was a slight pause. The emotion of the speaker communicated itself to the audience, and Mrs. Meredith Vyner, with tears in her eyes, declared, that for her part she so well understood what his feelings must have been, that she must have hated him (*hated* was said with the prettiest accent in the world), if he had not relinquished shooting on the spot.

Violet would have said the same, but her mother having volunteered the observation, closed her mouth. She really felt what her mother only spoke; but the intuitive knowledge of her mother's insincerity—the thorough appreciation of the tear which so sentimentally sparkled on that mother's eyelid—made her dread lest any expression of her own sentiments should be confounded with such affectation, and she was silent.

Cecil was hurt at her silence. The more so as she did not even look at him, but kept her eyes fixed upon her plate.

Meredith Vyner, who had been vainly beating his brains for a pat quotation, now gave up the attempt, and said—

"But then, my dear, *you* have so much sensibility. Why, I vow, if the story hasn't brought tears into her eyes—

Humor et in genas
Furtim labitur.

Certainly, there never was a more tender-hearted creature—nor one shrinking so much from the infliction of even the smallest pain."

Vyner, as he finished his sentence, turned aside his head to fill his nose with a pinch of snuff adequate to the occasion—as if it was only in some vociferous demonstration of the kind that he could supply eloquence capable of properly setting forth his wife's sensibility.

At the mention of her tender-heartedness, both Marmaduke and Violet involuntarily looked at her, and as they withdrew their eyes, their gaze met. No words can translate the language which passed in that gaze; it was but a second in duration, and yet in that second each soul was laid bare to the eyes of each.—The ironical smile which had stolen over their eyes changed, like the glancing hues on a dove's neck, from irony to surprise, from surprise to mutual assent, from assent to superb contempt. Marmaduke and Violet had never met before, yet in that one glance each said to the other, "So, you know this woman! You appreciate her sincerity! You know what a cruel hypocrite she is!"

Mrs. Vyner did not observe that look. She had felt Marmaduke's eyes were upon her, and affecting not to know it, threw an extra expression of sensibility into her face.

When Cecil fairly caught a sight of Violet's face, he saw on it the last faint traces of that contempt which she had expressed for her mother, but which he attributed to her unfeminine delight in field-sports, and her contempt for his sensibility.

He was glad when luncheon was concluded, and the party rose to ramble about the grounds. As they were walking through the garden, he managed to bring up the subject, and frankly asked her if she did not feel something like disdain at his chicken-heartedness.

"Disdain!" she exclaimed; "how could you imagine it? Knowing you to be so little effeminate that it could not spring but from a kind and affectionate nature, I assure you I look upon it as the very best feather you have stuck in your cap—at least in my presence. I have only contempt for the *affectation* of sensibility."

"It was what your father said—"

"My poor father understands me about as little as he understands mamma. Less he could not. Fond as I am of hunting, and every thing like exercise in the open air, I have seen too much of the mere Nimrods not to value them at their just ratio. Good in the field; detestable every where else."

"I'm delighted to hear you say it."

"I must confess to prizing *manliness* so high, that I prefer even brutality to cowardice. There is nothing to me so contemptible in a man or woman as moral weakness, and therefore I prefer even the outrages of strength to the questionable virtues of a weak, yielding, coddling mind."

"What do you mean by the questionable virtues of such a mind?" he asked.

"They are questionable, because not stable; the ground from which they spring being treacherous. A man who is weak will yield to good arguments; but he will also yield to bad arguments; and he will, moreover, yield against his conviction. A man who is timid will be cruel out of his very timidity, for there is nothing so cruel as cowardice."

By this time they had left the garden, and joined the others, who had disposed themselves in groups, which permitted their *tête-à-tête* to continue. Meredith Vyner, Mrs. St. John, and the clergyman's wife were in advance. Mrs. Langley Turner and young Lufton followed, conning over London acquaintance and London gossip. Marmaduke, Sir Harry, and Mrs. Vyner were very lively, talking on an infinite variety of topics—Mrs. Vyner making herself excessively engaging to Marmaduke, whom she had not seen since that Sunday night when his last words had been so contemptuous, his look so strange and voluptuous. She did not doubt that the great motive of his visit at the Grange was to put his threat of vengeance into execution; and determined either to soften him, or to learn his plans, the better to combat them.

George Maxwell walked behind them, scowling.

Julius remained in doors; so Violet and Cecil had only to lag a little behind, to enjoy a perfect *tête-à-tête*. Shot walked gravely at their heels.

The ramble about the grounds lasted all the afternoon. There only occurred one incident worth relating, as bearing upon the fortunes of two of the actors.

Cecil and Violet, in stopping to pick many flowers, had been left so far behind the others, that they determined to take a shorter cut to the house through a meadow lying alongside of the shrubbery. They had not gone many steps across the meadow, before a bull seemed to resent their intrusion. He began tearing up the ground, and tossing about his head in anger.

"I don't like the look of that animal," said Cecil. "Let us return."

She only laughed, and said—

"Return! No, no. He won't interfere with us. Besides, when you live in the country you must take your choice, either never enter a field where there are cattle, or never to to turn aside from your path, should the field be full of bulls. I made my choice long ago."

This was said with a sort of mock heroic air, which quite set Cecil's misgivings aside. He thought she must certainly be perfectly aware the bull was harmless, or she would not have spoken in that tone; and above all, would not have so completely disregarded what seemed to him rather formidable demonstrations on the part of the animal. They continued, therefore, to walk leisurely along the meadow, the bull bellowing at them, and following at a little distance. He was evidently lashing himself into the stupid rage peculiar to his kind, and Shot showed considerable alarm.

"For God's sake, Miss Vyner! let us away from this," said Cecil, agitated.

"He doesn't like Shot's appearance here," she calmly replied, as the dog slunk through the iron hurdles which fenced off the shrubbery.

She turned round to watch the bull, and her heart beat, as she saw him close his dull, fierce eye—the certain sign that he was about to make a rush.

Cecil saw it too, and placing his hand upon the iron hurdle, vaulted on the other side, obeying the rapid suggestion of danger as quickly as it was suggested.

No sooner was his own safety accomplished, than almost in the same instant that his feet touched the ground, the defenseless position of Violet rushed horribly across his mind.

"Good God!" he said to himself; "what have I done? How can I ever explain this?"

He vaulted back again to rush to her succor; but he was too late. His hesitation had not lasted two seconds, but they were two irrevocable seconds; during which Violet, partly out of bravado and contempt for the cowardice of her lover, and partly out of that virile energy and promptitude which on all occasion made her front the danger and subdue it, sprang forward at the animal about to rush, and, with her riding-whip, cut him sharply twice across the nose. Startled by this attack, and stinging with acute pain—the nose being the most sensitive part—the brute ran off bellowing, tail in air.

He had already relinquished the fight when Cecil came up. The coincidence was cruel. He felt it so. Violet, pale and trembling, passed her hand across her brow, but turning from Cecil, called to her dog.

"Shot! Shot! come here, you foolish fellow. He won't hurt you."

This speech was crushing. Cecil felt that he had slunk away from danger like the dog, and that Violet's words were leveled at him. Never was man placed in a more humiliating position. To have left a young girl to shift for herself on such an occasion, and to see her vanquish the enemy in his presence; to appear before a brave girl as a despicable coward, and to feel that he could not, by any means, explain his action, except to make himself more odious; for if he were not himself too terrified to face the danger, what utter selfishness would it appear for him to have so secured his own safety!

Cecil felt the difficulty of his position, and that chained his tongue. Violet, who was suffering morally as well as physically, was also unable to speak. The shock given to her frame by the recent peril was in itself considerable; and she trembled now it was past, almost as much as another would have trembled at the moment. But, perhaps, the moral shock was as great. She had begun to consider Cecil in the light of a lover, and was almost in love with him herself. What she had just witnessed turned all her feelings against him. Deep and bitter scorn uprooted all her previous regard, and she was angry with herself for having ever thought of him kindly.

They joined the rest of the party without uttering a word. "My dear Violet," exclaimed Mrs. Vyner, "how pale you look! Has any thing happened? Are you ill?"

Cecil's temples throbbed fearfully. He expected to hear himself exposed before them all,

and was trying to muster courage to endure either their scorn, or Violet's sarcastic irony in her description. She only said—

"Oh, nothing; only a little fright. There was a bull in the meadow who took offense at Shot, and began to threaten us. It is very foolish to be so agitated; but I can't help it."

"Very natural, too, my dear," said Mrs. St. John. "Come and let me give you a glass of wine: that will restore you."

"No, thank you," she replied; "it's not worth making a fuss about. It will go off in a minute or two. Well, Mrs. Langley Turner, have you settled any thing about the theatricals?"

"*Settled* nothing, my dear, but projected an immense deal. Let us lay our heads together a little."

Mrs. Langley Turner twined her arm round Violet's waist, and moved away with her.

Cecil was intent upon the structure of a dahlia.

Nothing more was said on the subject of the fright; and amidst his poignant sense of shame, there was a feeling of grateful reverence to Violet for having spared him. He knew her well enough to be certain that, as she had not revealed his conduct then, she would not whisper it in private. He knew her capable of crushing him in her scorn by some epigram such as she had uttered in the meadow, but incapable of a spiteful inuendo or sarcastic narration in private.

Nevertheless, *she* knew it. How could he again face her? How could he dwell under the same roof with her? He would not. He would set off on the morrow. He would invent some pretext; any thing, so that he had not to encounter the scorn of those haughty features.

The riding home was a painful contrast to the setting out; at least for the two lovers. The rest were as gay and chatty as before; the horses pranced, and shook their heads; Shot leaped up at Jessy's nose, and the sedater hound trotted calmly behind. The ring of laughter, the clatter of hoofs, and the barking of Shot, only made Cecil more conscious of the change. He rode on in sullen silence. Violet had taken her mother's place in the carriage, not feeling quite recovered: her mother mounted Jessy.

It would fill a volume to tell all that passed in the minds of Violet and Cecil during that ride. Her thoughts were all thoughts of unutterable scorn; his thoughts were of overwhelming humiliation. There was an oppressive, moody, suffocating sense of remorse and rage weighing down his spirits. He cursed [illegible] or that unreflecting action as deeply, more deeply, than if he had murdered man. In his impotent rage, he asked himself how it was that he had so utterly forgotten her to think solely of himself; and cursed his ill fortune that had placed the fence so close to him. Had it been only half a dozen paces removed, he should have thought of her before reaching it, and then he could have been spared this galling shame.

Violet tried to find excuses for him, but could not. As he rode past, rapt in gloomy thought, crest-fallen, shame-stricken, she wondered that she had ever thought him handsome. The scales had fallen from her eyes.

Who has not experienced some such revulsion of feeling? Who has not looked with astonishment upon some delusion, and asked himself, "Was it, then, really so? Was this the person I believed so great and good?" Alas! no; not *this*, but another. It was your ideal that you loved, and mistook for the reality. Seen in the bright colors of your fancy, that man appeared admirable, whom now you see to be contemptible.

The other day I took up a common pebble from the shore; washed by the advancing waves, and glittering in the summer sun, it looked like a gem. I carried it home; arrived there, I took it from my pocket: the pebble was dry, its splendor had vanished, and I held it for what it was—a pebble.

Such is life, with and without its illusions.

CHAPTER V.

A TRAIT OF JULIUS ST. JOHN.

As Cecil was dressing for dinner that day, he asked himself whether he really loved Violet; the answer was a decided negative. He had loved her till that afternoon; but that one fatal incident as completely turned his love into dislike, as it had turned Violet's into scorn. He disliked her, as we dislike those who have humiliated us, or who have witnessed some action which we know must appear contemptible in their eyes, but which we feel is not really so contemptible. He resented her superior courage; called her coarse and unwomanly, reckless and cruel. He remembered her beating Shot on the morning of their first interview, and it now seemed to him, as then, an act of wanton severity. He remembered what her father and mother said of her temper. They were right; she *was* a devil!

He went down to dinner quite satisfied that she was not at all the woman he should choose.

She was seated on the sofa, talking to Mrs. Broughton, and caressing the head of her favorite Shot. Marmaduke stood by her side, gazing enraptured upon her beauty.

Never was there a more adorably imperial creature than Violet. If in her riding habit, the prompt decision and energy of her manner conveyed the impression of her being somewhat masculine; directly she doffed it for the dress of her sex, she became at once a lovely, lovable woman.

I have a particular distaste to masculine women, and am therefore anxious that you should not imagine Violet one. She had, indeed, the virile energy and strength of will, which nature seems to have appointed to our sex; but all who had any penetration at once acknowledged that she was exquisitely feminine. Her manner had such grace, dignity, softness, and lovingness, tempering its energy and independence. She had grandeur without hardness, and gentleness without weakness. Her murderous eyes, whose flashing beauty few could withstand—there was something domineering in their splendor and fullness of

life—had, at the same time, a certain tenderness, the effect of which I know not how better to describe, than in the bold, felicitous comparison used by Goethe's mother, when she wrote to Bettina thus—"A violoncello was played, and I thought of thee; *it sounded so exactly like thy brown eyes.*"

I dwell with some gusto on the beauty of this creature; she was so beautiful! Majesty generally implies a certain stiffness: dignified women are detestable; but there was such majesty in Violet—such commanding grace—accompanied by such soft, winning manners, that in the midst of the sort of awe she inspired, you felt a yearning toward her. Firenzuola would have said of her, and said truly, that "*getta quasi un odor di regina,*" and yet, withal, no one was more simple and womanly.

As Cecil entered the room, he just caught this conclusion of Violet's speech—

"Besides, had it come to the worst—had the bull made his rush—I was in very good hands. Mr. Chamberlayne and Shot were with me."

This was uttered before she saw Cecil. She colored slightly as he came in, but continued her conversation in an unaltered tone. He felt no gratitude to her for sparing him, as, by this account of the affair, it was evidently her intention of doing; his self-love was so deeply wounded, that he only perceived the covert sarcasm of again coupling him with Shot. It made him congratulate himself on being no longer in danger of offering her his hand.

"What a wife!" he mentally exclaimed, as he walked up to Rose and Julius, and broke in upon their *tête-à-tête*, for which neither thanked him.

At dinner, he sat between Mrs. Broughton and her niece, who, regarding him as a wit, giggled at whatever he said. He was in high spirits. His gayety was forced, indeed, but it inspired some brilliant things, which I do not chronicle here for two reasons. First, they had no influence whatever on subsequent events. Secondly, very few repartees bear transplantation; they have an *apropos* which gives them their zest, and are singularly tame without it.

"By the way, Mr. St. John, Wincot has a mysterious story about you, which ought to be cleared up."

"Pray, what is it?"

"Oh! something impossible, grotesque, inconceivable, but true; at least, he swears to it," said Cecil.

"Let's hear it," said Mrs. Langley Turner.

"By all means," added Mrs. Broughton.

"By all means," echoed Julius. "I find myself the hero of a romance before I was aware of it."

All eyes were turned upon Tom Wincot.

He was not averse to be looked at, so neither blushed, nor let fall the glass suspended to his eye.

Wincot is young, good-looking, well-dressed; rides well, waltzes well; gains his livelihood at whist and écarté; pays debts of honor; has no ideas; knows nothing beyond the sphere of a club or a drawing-room, and has no power over the consonant *r*.

"I consider this vewy twaitewous," he said; "when I told Chamberlayne the stowy it was under stwict secwecy."

"That is to say," rejoined Cecil, "that you wished me particularly to divulge it."

"Not at all, not at all; a secwet is a secwet."

"You excite our curiosity to the highest pitch," said Mrs. Langley Turner.

"Quite thrilling," said Rose.

"Tell us the story yourself, Mr. Chamberlayne," said young Lufton.

"No, no; it is Wincot's story."

"Well; if your cuwiosity is excited, I must gwatify it. Besides, Mr. St. John has pewhaps some explanation. Yesterday, as I was wambling along the woad to town, I saw him wide down by the wiver. Well, would you cwedit it? he was cawying—it's twue, I vow—cawying a side of bacon!!!"

"Is that all?" asked Violet.

"All!" exclaimed the astonished dandy; "all! why, Miss Violet, I pledge you my vewacity that I wefused to believe it, it was so twemendous an appawition! Fancy, widing acwoss countwy with a side of bacon on your saddle! It must have been a wager. It must. Why, I would as soon have dwiven my gwandmother down Wegent-stweet; dwank clawet at an inn; gone to a soiwée in shoes; or any thing equally atwocious!"

"But let Mr. St. John explain," said Cecil, gayly. "This is a serious imputation on his dandyism. Unless he can clear himself of the charge, he will be utterly lost."

"What was it, Julius, my dear?" said Mrs. St. John.

"One of those things which he alone is capable of," interposed Marmaduke, warmly. "I will ask the ladies present to judge. Happening to meet Julius with that same side of bacon, I naturally asked him how he came to have it, and he told me the story with his usual simplicity. This it is. He was riding through Little Aston on his way home; he stopped opposite a broker's shop where an auction was going on. A side of bacon was knocked down to him, much to his astonishment, but he paid for it, threw it across his saddle, and carried it twelve miles as a present to one of his poor cottagers. The poor woman was as much shocked as Mr. Wincot to see the young squire so equipped, but her gratitude was unbounded. I could have hugged him for it; the more so, as, with all my admiration for the simple goodness and courage of the act, I doubt whether even *now* I should have courage to imitate it, and certainly should never have had such an idea come unassisted into my head."

"You are trying to make a mountain out of a molehill, Marmaduke," said Julius. "The thing was quite simple. I had to pay for the bacon; why should not one of my cottagers benefit by it?"

"Yes, yes; but carrying it yourself."

"I had not my servant with me. It was no trouble. As to what people thought, that never troubled me. Those who knew me knew what I was; those who knew me not did not bestow a thought about me."

Every one declared that it was an act of great kindness and philosophy; except Tom Wincot, who pronounced it "vewy extwaowdinawy," and seemed to think nothing could justify such a forgetfulness of what was due to oneself. But of all present, no one was more

proud, more pleased than Rose, who looked at her "dear, little, ugly man," as she called him, with fresh admiration all the evening afterward. It was a trait to have won her heart; if, indeed, her heart had not been won before.

CHAPTER VI.

HIDDEN MEANINGS.

The subject of private theatricals was again started that evening when all were assembled in the drawing-room; and as the conversation happened by chance to be one of those underneath which there runs a current of deep significance to certain parties, while to the apprehension of the rest there is nothing whatever meant beyond what is expressed; I shall detail some portions of it.

But first to dispose of the scene, as it is rather crowded. In the right-hand corner there is a rubber of whist played between Meredith Vyner and Mrs. Broughton, against Sir Harry Johnstone and Mrs. St. John.

Seated on the music-stool is Rose, who has just ceased playing, and by her stands Julius, who, having turned over her leaves, is now talking to her.

At the round table in the center, Mrs. Meredith Vyner, Mrs. Langley Turner, Miss Broughton, and Violet are disposed among Marmaduke, Maxwell, Tom Wincot, Captain Heath, and young Lufton; the ladies knitting purses, and engaged on tambour work: the gentlemen making occasional remarks thereon, and rendering bungling assistance in the winding of silk.

To the left, Blanche and Cecil, the latter with his guitar in his hand.

The fire blazes cheerfully. The room is brilliant with light. Mrs. Meredith Vyner is applauding herself secretly at her increasing success with Marmaduke, who she doubts not will soon have lost all his anger toward her. Maxwell looks blacker than ever, but is silent. Violet is recovering from her disappointment, and settling into *calm* contempt of Cecil. Marmaduke laughs in his sleeve at Mrs. Vyner's attempts, but is too much struck with Violet, not to be glad of any thing which seems likely to smooth the path of acquaintance with her. Captain Heath is rather annoyed at having lost his accustomed seat next to Blanche, with whom he best likes to converse. Cecil has completely shaken off his depression, and is wondering he never before discovered what incomparable eyes Blanche has.

"But about these theatricals," said Mrs. Langley Turner. "I am dying to have something settled. You, Mrs. Vyner, are the cleverest of the party, do you suggest some play. What do you say to *Othello*?"

"Oh!" said Mrs. Broughton, "don't think of tragedy."

"No, no," rejoined Mrs. Vyner; "if the audience must laugh, let it at least be *with* us."

"By all means," said Vyner, shuffling the cards; "remember, too,

Male si mandata loqueris
Aut dormitabo aut ridebo.

"At the same time," observed Mrs. Vyner; "Mr. Ashley would make a superb Othello."

"I rather think," replied Marmaduke, slightly vailing his eyes with the long lashes; "Iago would suit me better."

Mrs. Vyner affected not to understand the allusion.

"You would not *look* the villain," she said.

"Perhaps not," he replied, laughing; "but I could *act* it."

"By the way," interposed Julius, "surely that's a very false and un-Shakspeerian notion current, respecting Iago's appearance; people associate moral with physical deformity, though as Shakspeare himself says—

There is no art
To find the mind's construction in the face.

The critics, I observe, in speaking of an actor, as Iago, are careful to say he 'he *looked* the villain.' Now, if he looked the villain, I venture to say he did not look Iago."

"Mr. St. John is right," said Cecil. "Had Iago 'worn his heart upon his sleeve,' no one could have been duped by him. Whereas every body places implicit confidence in him. He is 'honest Iago'—a 'fellow of exceeding honesty;' and he is this, not only to the gull Roderigo, and the royal Othello, but equally so to the gentle Desdemona, and his companion in arms, the 'arithmetician' Cassio."

"So you see," said Marmaduke, turning to Mrs. Vyner, "in spite of your handsome compliment, I might have the *physique de l'emploi*. Then Cecil would be a famous Cassio,

Framed to make women false."

Mrs. Vyner asked herself, "Is he showing me his cards? Does he mean to play Iago here, and to select Cecil as his tool? No; he can't be such a blockhead; but what *does* he mean then?"

"If we are not to play tragedy," observed Mrs. Broughton; "what use is there in wasting argument on it. Let us think of a comedy."

"*The Rivals*," suggested Captain Heath; "it has so many good parts, and that I take to be the grand thing in private theatricals, where every one is ambitious of playing *primo violino*."

"Very natural too!" said Julius.

"*Very!*" rejoined Heath sarcastically.

"When people laugh," said Julius, "at the vanity displayed by amateur actors, in their reluctance to play bad parts, it is forgotten that there is a wide distinction between playing for your amusement, and playing for your bread. Every actor on the stage would refuse indifferent parts, were it possible for him to do so. And when gentlemen and ladies wish to try their skill at acting, they very naturally seek to play such parts as will give their talents most scope."

"We really ought to thank Mr. St. John," said Mrs. Vyner, "for the ingenious excuse he has afforded our vanity, and he must have a good part himself as reward."

"You are very kind," said Julius; "but I have no notion whatever of acting, and must beg you to pass me over entirely, unless you want a servant, or something of that kind."

"I am sure," said Rose, in a low tone, "you would act beautifully."

"Indeed, no."

"Did you ever try?"

"Never. I have no *vis comica*; and as to tragedy, my person excludes me from that."

Rose was silent and uncomfortable; all people are when others allude to their own personal deficiencies.

"Will you play Sir Anthony, Sir Harry?"

"Two by cards—I beg your pardon, Mrs. Vyner—Sir Anthony Absolute? Yes, yes, you may put me down for that."

"And who is to be Captain Absolute? You, Mr. Ashley?"

"Perhaps Mr. Ashley would play Falkland," suggested Mrs. Broughton.

"No, no, Falkland is cut out for Mr. Maxwell—he is the most tragic among us."

Maxwell answered with a grim smile.

"At any rate," said Mrs. Langley Turner, "let me play Mrs. Malaprop. I quite long to be an allegory on the banks of the Nile."

"And Violet," said Mrs. Vyner, with the slightest possible accent of sarcasm, "can be Lydia Languish."

"No, mamma," replied Violet, "you ought to play that—it would suit you."

"*I* play? . . . . my *dear* child!"

"Do you not intend to take a part?"

"My dear Violet, how could you suppose such a thing?"

"I imagined," replied Violet, with exquisite naturalness, "that you were an accomplished actress."

"So I should have said, from the little I have the pleasure of knowing of Mrs. Vyner," observed Marmaduke.

The two arrows went home; but Mrs. Vyner's face was impassive.

"How imprudent Violet is!" said Blanche, in a whisper, to Cecil.

"Do you understand that?" said Rose to Julius.

"What?"

"Nothing, if you did not catch it."

"But who is to be Sir Lucius, we haven't settled that," said Mrs. Broughton.

"I wather think I should play Sir Lucius O'Twigger, as my bwogue is genewally pwonounced so vewy Iwish."

"But," interposed Marmaduke, "we have forgotten Cecil . . . . Oh! there is Acres—a famous part!"

"Surely, Captain Absolute would be better," suggested Violet.

"Is that a sarcasm?" Cecil asked himself.

"Any body, rejoined Marmaduke, "can play the captain, whereas Acres is a difficult part. It is not easy to play cowardice naturally."

This is one of those observations, which, seeming to have nothing in them, yet fall with strange acrimony on the ears of certain of the parties. It made Violet and Cecil uncomfortable.

"Besides," pursued Marmaduke, "it is a rule in acting, that we always best play the part most unlike our own; and as Cecil happens to be the coolest of the cool in a duel, he ought to play the duel scene to perfection."

"Did you ever fight a duel, then?" exclaimed Miss Broughton. "How romantic!"

Violet was astonished. Cecil, delighted at this opportunity of redeeming himself in her eyes, said, "Marmaduke, who was my second, will tell you that it was by no means romantic, Miss Broughton. A mere exchange of harmless shots about a very trivial circumstance."

"And," inquired Miss Broughton, with inimitable naïveté, "were you not afraid?"

A general laugh followed this question, except from the whist players, who were squabbling over some disputed point and from Violet, who was asking herself the same question.

"Why," rejoined Cecil, gayly, "I suppose you would hardly have me avow it, if it were so; cowardice is so contemptible."

"Oh, I don't know," said Miss Broughton.

"If I may speak without bravado, I should say that, although I am a coward by *temperament*, I do not want bravery on reflection."

"What the deuce do you mean by bwavewy on weflection?"

"Some people," interposed Rose laughing, "have *de l'esprit après coup*; so Mr. Chamberlayne doubtless means that he has courage when the danger is *over*. I had you there, Mr. Chamberlayne. That is my return for your uncomplimentary speech to me at dinner."

Violet blushed; Rose's jest seemed to her so cruel that she quite felt for Cecil. He also blushed, knowing the application Violet would make. The rest laughed.

"Without accepting Miss Rose's unpardonable interpretation," said Cecil, "I may acknowledge some truth in it; and as I am thus drawn into a sort of confession, forgive my egotism if I dwell a little longer on the subject. I am of a very nervous excitable temperament. I shrink from any thing sudden, and always tremble at sudden danger. Therefore am I constitutionally a coward. My instinct is never to front danger, but to escape it; but my reason tells me that the surest way of escaping it, in most cases, is to front it; and as soon as the suddenness is over, and I have familiarized my mind with the danger, I have coolness and courage enough to front it, whatever it may be. This is what I call bravery on reflection. My first movement, which is instinctive, is cowardly; my second, which is reflective, is courageous."

"This is so pwofoundly metaphysical that I can't appwehend it at all."

"I think I can," said Violet; "and the distinction seems to me to be just."

Cecil was greatly relieved, and he thanked her with a smile, as he said, "I remember, some years ago, being with some ladies in a farm-yard, when a huge mastiff rushed furiously out at us. Before I had time to check my first instinctive movement, I had vaulted over the gate and was beyond his reach; but no sooner was I on the other side than I remembered the ladies were at his mercy. I instantly vaulted back again; but not before the dog was wagging his tail, and allowing them to pat his head. But imagine what they thought of my gallantry! They never forgave me. I could offer no excuse—there was none plausible enough to offer—and to this day they despise me as a coward."

"Had you given them on the spot," said Violet, gravely, "the explanation you have just given us, they would not have despised you."

"I am greatly obliged to you for the assurance."

He looked his thanks as he said this.

"Still, it must be deuced stwange to find oneself in a pwedicament, and no cowage *apwopos*, but only on delibewate weflection."

"It is one of the misfortunes of my temperament."

"It certainly is a misfortune," said Violet.

She became thoughtful. Cecil was radiant.

CHAPTER VII.

MUTUAL SELF-EXAMINATION.

The entrance of tea changed the conversation, and changed also the positions of the party. Cecil relinquished his place by the side of Blanche, much to her regret, and managed to get near Violet, who was anxious to make up for her previous coldness and contempt. She felt that she had wronged him. She admitted to the full his explanation of the incident which had so changed her feelings, and, with the warmth of a generous nature owning its error, she endeavored to make him understand that she had wronged him. Two happier hearts did not beat that night.

Could they have read aright their feelings, however, they would have seen something feverish and unhealthy in this warmth. It was not the sympathy of sympathetic souls but a mutual desire to forget, and have forgotten the feelings which had agitated them a little while ago.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner was more taciturn than was her wont. The covert insinuations Marmaduke had thrown out puzzled her extremely; while they were in sufficient keeping with what had gone before, to prevent her supposing he attached *no* meaning to them.

"Could he really suppose her in love with Cecil?" she asked herself; "and was he serious in thus presenting himself in the character of an Iago?"

Much did she vex her brain, and to little purpose. The truth is, she was attributing to these words a coherence and significance which they had not in Marmaduke's mind. She assumed them to be indications of some deeply-laid scheme; whereas they were the mere spurts of the moment, seized upon by him as they presented themselves, and without any ulterior purpose. He had no plan; but he was deeply enraged against her, and lashed her with the first whip at hand. Had he been as cunning as she was, he would never have betrayed himself in this way; but being a man of vehement passions, and accustomed to give way to his impulses, it was only immense self-command which enabled him to contain himself so much as he did. Julius went home to dream of Rose. Marmaduke to pass a sleepless night thinking of Violet. He had never seen a woman he admired so much. For the first time in his life, he had encountered a gaze that did not bend beneath his own; for the first time he had met with one whose will seemed as indomitable as his own, whose soul was as passionate. It was very different from the effect which Mary Hardcastle had excited: it was not so irritating, but more voluptuous. In one word, the difference was this: Mary excited the lower, Violet the higher qualities of his nature. There was reverence in his feeling for Violet; in his feeling for Mary there had been nothing but a sensual fascination.

Maxwell was restless. He was growing very jealous of Marmaduke—Mrs. Vyner's interest not escaping him. Violet was also sleepless. She thought of Marmaduke, and of the two interchanged glances which told her how they had both read alike the character of her mother; and wondered by what penetration he had discovered it. She thought him also a magnificent—a *manly* man; but she thought no more. Cecil occupied her mind.

As I have said, her first impulse was to admit to the full Cecil's explanation, and to revoke her sentence of contempt. As she lay meditating on the whole of the circumstances, and examined his character calmly, she was forced to confess that if he did not deserve the accusation of cowardice, yet by his own showing his first impulse was to secure his own safety, and *then* to think of others. This looked like weakness and selfishness: two odious vices in her eyes.

The result of her meditations was, that Cecil had regained some portion of her liking, but had lost forever all hold upon her esteem. Pretty much the same change took place in his mind with regard to her. He admitted that she was high-minded, generous, lovely—but not lovable. There was something in her which awed him, and which he called repulsive.

He went to sleep thinking what a sweet, lovable creature Blanche was, and how superior to Violet.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF UGLINESS.

The next day Julius was meditatively fishing in the mill-pool adjoining the village school, and trying to decipher the character of Rose, who alternately fascinated and repulsed him by her vivacity.

I have said that he was utterly destitute of all personal beauty. This is so common an occurrence that it would scarcely be worth mentioning in any other case—beauty being the quality which, of all others, men can best dispense with. A charm when possessed, its absence is not an evil. In Julius's case, however, it happened to be important, from the importance he attributed to it; and the excessive importance given to it by him thus originated.

His nurse was a very irascible woman, and whenever she was angry, taunted him with being such "an ugly, little fright." As she never called him ugly but when she punished him, he early began to associate something peculiarly disagreeable with ugliness. This would have soon passed away at school, had not the boys early discovered that his ugliness was a sore point with him; accordingly, endless were the jests and sneers which, with the brutal recklessness of boyhood, they flung at him on that score. The climax of all was on one cold winter morning, when the shivering boy crept up to the fire, and was immediately repulsed by a savage kick from one of the elder boys there

warming himself. Crying with the pain, he demanded why he was kicked. The *why* really was a simple movement of wanton brutality and love of power, usual enough among boys; but the tyrant chose to say, "Because you're such a beast!"

"No, I'm not," he sobbed.

"Yes, you are, though!"

"You've no business to kick me; I didn't do any thing to you."

"I shall kick you as much as I like—you're so d—d ugly!"

It had never occurred to him before to be thrashed for his ugliness; and although he deeply felt the injustice, yet he, from that day, imagined that his appearance was a serious misfortune.

Increasing years, of course, greatly modified this impression, but the effect was never wholly effaced. From the constant dinning in his ears that he was ugly, he had learned to accept it as a fact about which there could be no dispute, but which no more troubled him than the consciousness that he was not six feet high. He became hardened to the conviction. Sneers or slights affected him no more. He was ugly, and knew it. To tell him of it was to tell him of that to which he had long made up his mind, and about which he had no vestige of vanity.

It is remarkable how conceited plain people are of their persons. You hear the fact mentioned and commented on in society, as if it were surprising; and you catch yourself "wondering" at some illustration of it, as if experience had not furnished you with numberless examples of the same kind. But the explanation seems to me singularly simple. You have only to take the reverse of the medal, and observe that beauty is not half so solicitous of admiration as deformity, and the solution of the question must present itself. Conceit—at least that which shows itself to our ridicule—is an eager solicitation of our admiration. Now, beauty being that which calls forth spontaneous admiration, needs not to be solicitous; and the more unequivocal the beauty, the less coquettish the woman. When, however, a woman's beauty is so equivocal that some deny it, while others admit it, the necessity for confirmation makes her solicitous of every one's praise; and she exhibits coquetry and conceit—due proportion being allowed for the differences in amount of love of approbation inherent in different individuals (a condition which influences the whole of this argument). Carry this further, and arrive at positive plainness, and you have this result: the *amour propre* of the victim naturally softens the harsh outlines of the face. He sees himself in a more becoming mirror. However the fact may have been forced upon him that he is ill-looking, he never knows the *extent* of his ugliness, and he is aware that people differ immensely in their estimates of him; he has—fatal circumstance!—even been admired. Now, admiration is such a balm to the wounded self-love, that he craves for more—he is eager to solicit an extension of it, and hence that desire to attract closer attention to him manifested by audacity of dress, certain that the closer he is observed, the more he must be admired. He feels he is not so ugly as people say; he knows some do not think so; he wants your confirmation of the discerning few. In a thousand different ways he solicits some of your admiration. You see his object, and smile at his conceit.

Now the effect of Julius St. John's education had been to cut out, root and branch, that needless desire to be admired for what he knew was not admirable. He had made up his mind to his ugliness. The benefit was immense; it saved him from the hundred tortures of self-love to which he must otherwise have been exposed—that Tantalus thirst for admiration which can not be slaked; and it imparted a quiet dignity to his manner, which was not without its charm.

The deplorable circumstance was, that he had also imbibed a notion of the great importance of beauty in the eyes of women, which made him consider himself incapable of being loved. As a boy, maid-servants had refused to be kissed by him, because he was "a fright." As a young man, he had often been conscious that girls said they were engaged when he asked them to dance, because they would not dance with one so ugly. In the novels which he read the heroes were invariably handsome, and great stress was laid upon their beauty; while the villains and scoundrels were as invariably ill-favored. The conversation of girls ran principally upon handsome men; and their ridicule was inexhaustible upon the unfortunates whom Nature had treated like a stepmother.

One trait will paint the whole man. They were one day talking about ugliness at the Hall, when Rose exclaimed: "After all, beauty is but *skin deep*."

"True," he replied, "but opinion is no deeper."

That one word revealed to her the state of his mind on the subject. And although he often thought of Swift, Wilkes, Mirabeau, and other hideous men celebrated for their successes with women; he more often thought of the bright-eyed, hump-backed, gifted, witty, humble Pope, who so bitterly expiated his presumption in raising his thoughts to the lovely Mary Wortley Montague. If genius could not compensate for want of beauty, how should he, who had no genius, not even shining talents, succeed in making a woman pardon his ugliness?

That Julius was strangely in error you may easily suppose; but this was perhaps the only crotchet of his honest, upright mind. A truer, manlier creature never breathed. He was molded from the finest clay of humanity; and, although possessing none of those distinguished talents which separate a few men from their contemporaries, and throw a luster over perhaps weak and unworthy natures, yet of no one that I have ever known could I more truly say—

> His life was gentle; and the elements
> So mixed in him, that Nature might stand up
> And say to all the world, *This was a man!*

To know him was to love him: it was more, it was to revere him. There was something ennobling in his intercourse. You felt that all he did and said sprang from the purest truth. He was utterly unaffected, and won your confidence by the simple truthfulness of his whole being. There was perhaps as little of what is supposed to captivate women in his person and

manner as in any man I ever knew; but, at the same time, I never knew a man so calculated to make a wife adore him. In a word —he could not flirt, but he could love.

The reader will be at no loss to discover the reason of certain doubts and hesitations on his part respecting Rose, with whom he was greatly charmed, and of whom he was also greatly afraid. The very vivacity which allured, alarmed him. She was so bright, so brilliant, that he was afraid to trust his heart in her keeping, lest she should be as giddy as she was gay; and, above all, lest she should scorn the mediocrity of such a man as he knew himself to be. His first impulse was always to seek her society, to sun himself in her eyes, to let his soul hold unrestrained communion with hers; but, when he came to reflect on the delicious hours he had spent by her side, he trembled lest they should be only luring him into an abyss from which there would be no escape.

Early in life he had suffered bitterly from such a deception. He fell in love with a beautiful and lively cousin of his, who, perhaps from coquetry, perhaps from thoughtlessness, certainly exhibited such signs of returning his affection, that he one day ventured to overcome his timidity, and declared his passion. She only laughed at him; and that very evening he heard her answer her mother's remonstrances on the giddiness of her conduct toward him, by saying, "But, dear mamma, who could have supposed that he was serious; the idea of a woman marrying *him*."

"He is an excellent creature," said the mother.

"Perhaps so, but you must confess he is very ugly."

Julius heard no more; it was a girl of sixteen, in all her thoughtlessness, who spoke; but those words were never effaced from his memory.

The truth is, Rose was as saucy as youth, beauty, and uncontrollable spirits could make her, and the general impression she made on men was, that of being too *flirty* and giddy for love.

Julius was fishing that day with no sport but in the chase of his own fantastic thoughts; which every philosophic fisherman must admit is part of the great pleasure in throwing out the line. People wonder what amusement can be found in fishing, and Dr. Johnson's definition is thought triumphant; but if they will allow one of the most unskillful anglers that ever handled a rod to answer, I would say that when you have good sport, it is a pleasant excitement, and when you catch nothing, it is a most dulcet mode of meditating. You sit in the boat or stand on the bank: the river runs gently and equably before you; the float wanders with it; and the current of your thoughts is undisturbed.

No sport did Julius have that day; not a single "run;" but as a compensation, he was joined by Rose herself, who had been to visit Mrs. Fletcher, the schoolmistress, to encourage the children.

"How is it," said Rose, "Mr. Ashley is not with you? Does he not indulge in this gentle sport? or is he too tender-hearted? for it is monstrously cruel, you know!"

"Marmaduke is not calm enough in his temperament for any thing so sedate as fishing; and I doubt whether he would think much of any sporting less exciting than a tiger hunt, or perhaps a boar hunt. What do you think of him?"

"I don't think at all of him. In one evening I am not able to form an opinion of any one; "at least," checking herself, "not often. He didn't say any thing remarkably brilliant, did he?"

"Brilliant! No."

"The only part of his conversation, I remember is what he related of you and your side of bacon. I liked his manner of telling that. It was in a tone of real friendship."

"Yes, Marmaduke has a regard for me. But don't you think him superbly handsome?"

"I don't like handsome men."

This was said with perfect unaffectedness; but he raised his eyes quickly, and gave her just such a look as she remembered him to have given her once before, when they were talking of Leopardi, and it embarrassed her. Indeed, said to an ugly man, this had an equivocal sound: it was either a sarcasm or a declaration.

"You are singular, then," was his quiet reply.

"Why singular, in preferring brains to beauty? Are we women really, do you think, the children we are said to be, and only fit to be amused with dolls? That is not like your usual respect for our sex!"

"Come, come, you do not state the case fairly. The question is not, whether you or your sex prefer beauty to brains, but whether you prefer beauty to ugliness? It is curious to notice how this question is always confused in this way, by mixing up with it an element that does not properly belong to it. People say, 'Oh, a clever plain man before a handsome fool!" and then argue, as if all the plain men were necessarily clever, and all the handsome men imperatively fools.

"Well, I'm sure, handsome men generally are—not, perhaps, fools—but certainly not clever; they think of nothing but their beauty. *Their* beauty—the frights!"

"I can not agree with you. Running over the list of great men you will find the proportion greatly in favor of handsome men; which, when you come to reflect how few handsome men there are, compared to the thousands of ugly men, is the more striking. The reason I take to be this: these men, from their very intellectual greatness, must have had great beauty of expression, so that with features a little better than ordinary they would rank among the handsome. It may be said, indeed, that very fine organizations include genius and beauty."

"Oh!" she replied, laughing, "if I once get into an argument with you, you'll make out any thing. But I won't be browbeaten by logic: 'hang up philosophy!' as Benedict says. I'm as difficult to be reasoned out of my convictions as if I were a logician myself. I don't like handsome men, I have said it; nor shall you reason me into liking them."

"Very well, very well. I certainly have no cause to wish it."

"Except the love of victory in argument, eh?"

"The victory must be on my side; it is gain-

ed already. If two men equal in talent and goodness, but greatly unequal in appearance, were placed before you, the handsomer must excite the preference, and that is all our cause of battle amounts to."

"Oh, men, men! how you will argue!"

At this moment they were joined by Marmaduke, who was all anxiety about the private theatricals; not for themselves, but because he saw in them an excellent excuse for being constantly at the Hall, and in Violet's society.

With his usual impetuosity Marmaduke had already settled that Violet should be his wife. Love at first sight, which may be a fiction with regard to the colder children of the north, is no fiction with regard to such passionate natures as his; and he was in love with Violet, without seeking to disguise it. Indeed, he spoke in such raptures of her to Rose, that she smiled and looked significantly at Julius, who returned her glance, and confirmed her suspicions

CHAPTER X.

THE GREAT COMMENTATOR.

"Eccovi un de' compositor di libri bene meriti di republica, postillatori, glosatori, construttori, additatori, scoliatori, traduttori! . . . . . .

. . . O bella etimolgia, e di mio proprio Marte or ora *deprompta!* Or dunque quindi *prope jam versus movo* il gresso, per che voglio notarla *majoribus literis* nel mio *propriarum elucubrationum libro*."—GIORANDO BRUNO. *Candelajo.*

DURING this conversation between the lovers, another pair of undeclared lovers were standing on the steps of the terrace, "talking of lovely things that conquer death," and yielding themselves up to the luxury of a *tête-à-tête*, wherein glances were more eloquent than tongues, and hearts fluttered like new-caught birds, at the most seemingly insignificant phrase.

These were Cecil and Blanche. I call them undeclared lovers, because not only were they ignorant of each other's feelings, but ignorant also of their own. Blanche's love had been of gradual growth. The lively, handsome, accomplished Cecil had early made a deep impression on her, though her shy, retiring disposition gave no signs of it; and his attentions on the evening before had been so delightful that she was still under their influence.

That in relinquishing Violet, he should turn to her complete opposite, Blanche, is nothing but what one may have anticipated. Her charms were brought into stronger relief by the contrast; and it has always been remarked that the heart is never so susceptible to a new impression as when it has been in any way robbed of an old affection. Partly, no doubt, because the feelings are the best attuned to love when in that state of unsatisfied excitement; for—

> Say that upon the altar of her beauty,
> You sacrifice your tears, your sighs, your heart,

still, the sacrifice is so sweet, that it is with difficulty we forego it; and if the *object* change the *feeling* still remains. Partly, also, because the *amour propre*, outraged by a defeat, is glad to be flattered by the chance of a new success.

There they stood, enchanting and enchanted, when Meredith Vyner put his head out of the glass door of the drawing-room which opened on to the terrace, and said, "Mr. Chamberlayne, you are not doing any thing particular, are you?"

"Not at all, sir."

"Then if you have nothing better to amuse you, just step with me into my study; I have a new discovery to communicate, which will, I think, delight you."

Nothing better to amuse him! to leave Blanche for some twaddle about Horace! was it not provoking? But he was forced to go, there was no escaping. If any thing could have compensated him, it would have been the expression of impatience on Blanche's face, and the look with which she seemed to say, "Don't stay too long."

When they were in the study, Meredith Vyner placed his snuff-box on the table, and, resting his left foot on the fender, began stroking his protuberant calf in a very deliberate manner. This was a certain sign of his being at that moment struggling with some conception, which demanded the greatest clearness and composure, adequately to bring forth. His mind was tottering under the weight of an unusual burden. As the left hand slowly descended the inner part of his leg, from the knee to the ankle, and as slowly ascended again the same distance, Cecil saw that he was arranging in his head something of more consequence than a verbal criticism. "The discovery I am about to impart," he said at last, with a slight pomposity, "is not perfectly elaborated in my mind, since the first gleam of it only came to me last night. It kept me sleepless. I have meditated profoundly on it since, and I am now in a condition to communicate it to you."

In spite of the solemnity of this introduction, Cecil, whose thoughts were on the terrace, found great difficulty in assuming a proper air of attentive interest. Vyner did not remark it, but continued—

"The discovery is so simple when once mentioned—like all truly great discoveries—that one asks oneself, is it possible that hitherto it should have been overseen? It goes, however, to nothing less than the entire revolution of the Horatian Sapphic. Look here: you must often, I am sure, have been disagreeably affected by the absurdity of

> Labitur ripa, Jove non probante, u-
> xorius amnis.

"This sort of caprice is very funny in Canning's

> *U-*
> -niversity of Göttingen:

but only tolerable in comic verse: in a serious ode it is detestable, and I can not believe so careful and fastidious a poet (who was no innovator, recollect! none of your *école romantique!*) guilty of it—"

"You propose a new reading?" suggested Cecil, feeling called upon to make some remark.

"New reading! no: that is the paltry trick of a comentator, who endeavors to escape a difficulty by denying its existence. No, no; my edition will have none of these trivialities. Every thing I print shall have a solid substance. I intend my edition *to last.* To the point, however; the difficulty vanishes at once if we suppose, as is most natural to believe, that Horace's Sapphics, were not composed of *four* lines but

of *three*—the fourth line being really nothing but the Adonic termination to the third—like the tail to an Italian sonnet—or better still, like the lengthening of the conluding line in the Spenserian stanza: which has a magnificent swing and sweep in its amplitude, as if gathering up into its mighty arms the rich redundancy of poetic inspiration. Thus instead of

> Iliæ dum se nimium querenti
> Jactat ultorem, vagus et sinistra
> Labitur ripa, Jove non probante, *u*-
> xorius amnis.

The verses read thus:—

> Iliæ dum se nimium querenti
> Jactat ultorem, vagus et sinistra
> Labitur ripa, Jove non probante, uxorius amnis.

And so throughout. Does not the sweep of this last line carry a fine harmony with it? Is it not incomparably superior to the mean, niggling, clipping versification as we usually receive it? There can not be a question about it. And if you come to reflect, you will see how the error has crept in by the copyists being cramped for room, and writing the Adonic addition below, as if it were a new line. But it is no more a new line, than the additional syllables in Spenser are new lines; nevertheless, we often see printers forced to break a line into two. Here is an example," taking up a volume, "which occurs in Tennyson, whom I opened this morning." And he read aloud:—

> "They call me cruel-hearted, but I care not what they say,
> For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I'm to be *Queen o' the May*."

"There," throwing the book down, "now suppose a few centuries hence all our literature to have perished, except half a dozen poets, some noodle of a commentator will imagine that "Queen o' the May' is a separate verse, and will write learned twaddle on the versification of the English!"

An ample pinch closed this triumphant peroration; and Vyner holding his head slightly downward to bring his nose in contact with his finger and thumb, looked up over that finger and thumb at Cecil, who had for some minutes ceased to hear what he was saying, having caught a glimpse of Blanche walking on the lawn with Captain Heath. Cecil disliked the captain: and now a vague sentiment of jealousy hovered about his mind. No wonder, then, if he paid little heed to his host, and his host's observations on an idle point of philology. Of late he had become horribly bored by these consultations, and had often wished Horace and his amateur editor buried irrecoverably beneath the dust of Herculaneum; but never was his inattention so ill-timed as on that occasion!

"What are you looking at?" inquired Vyner, in a tone which his politeness could not completely subdue.

"Looking at? Nothing," said Cecil embarrassed. "I was reflecting—"

"Oh! on my discovery?"

"Yes. It occurs to me that I have met with it before somewhere."

Cecil said this by way of cutting short the discussion, perfectly aware that Vyner was too much of a commentator to care one straw about an opinion, unless he were the originator.

"Impossible! Im-pos-sible!" ejaculated Vyner, much in the strain that Dominie Sampson may have ejaculated "prodigious!"

"It's very ingenious," said Cecil, who did not know a word about it, "very; and true."

"Yes, yes, but you think it is not original? Its originality is every thing with me."

"Perhaps as some compromise between your theory and the ordinary one, you might say that the *orius amnis* and the Adonic termination generally is only a termination, not a new verse."

"Compromise!" exclaimed the astonished Vyner, "why that *is* my theory!"

Cecil was posed. Convicted of such palpable inattention as to have suggested as an improvement the very idea which had just been explained to him, he could but stutter out some incoherent phrases of excuse.

Vyner was doubly hurt. The inattention was one offense, but that was nothing to the careless way in which Cecil had proposed as an indifferent modification the grand discovery he, Vyner, had made, which was to immortalize him. With an air of quiet dignity, which Cecil had never seen before, the offended philologist assuring him he was not ripe yet for such subjects, which could scarcely be a matter of surprise at his age, he bowed him out.

CHAPTER XI.

CECIL AGAIN WRITES TO FRANK.

ALTHOUGH you have not answered my letters, Frank, I must write to you once more, if only to gratify that *besoin d'épanchement* which all lovers feel. Were I a century or two older, I might carve my Blanche's name on every tree, *comme cela se pratiquait autrefois;* but being a frock-coated nineteenth-century prosaic creature, I am condemned to write on unsentimental Bath post, that which should be confided only to the trees.

You will doubtless raise those wondering eyebrows at the sight of the name Blanche. It is not an erratum for Violet, I assure you; I have given up all thoughts of that high-spirited, imperial, but imperious creature. I looked into my heart, and found I loved her not. She is evidently hurt at my inconstancy; but, on nearer acquaintance, I found Blanche so infinitely preferable, that I could not help making the comparison. Fortunately I had not gone too far to recede, and the haughty girl will, I dare say, soon be consoled.

I have not given you a description of Blanche. Shakspeare has anticipated it in these lines—

> If lusty Love should go in quest of beauty,
> Where should he find it but in Lady Blanche?

She is very fair, with a skin of dazzling loveliness, long, dreamy eyes, always moist with emotion, an exquisite smile, a low, soft voice—"an excellent thing in woman"—and a wondrous head of hair, which has that bright golden hue which Italians prize so highly—indeed, Firenzuola says, "*che de' capelli il proprio e vero colore è esser biondi.*"

We have all but declared our passion. It has been declared by our eyes, but as yet I have had no favorable opportunity of doing it in form. That she loves me, I am certain; still more

certain that I love her. She is the only woman I ever met who would make me happy, and I feel that she will change me into a quiet, domestic being. High time, too, seeing that I have squandered my patrimony. However, what with my four thousand pounds, and the handsome dowry Vyner will assuredly give his daughter, we shall be able to live modestly till I can get diplomatic employment. Once his son-in-law, Vyner will be forced to exert his interest in my behalf.

By the way, it is fortunate I have already captured Blanche's affections, for I have certainly lost all Vyner's favor, at least for the present. He was giving me a tedious account of some twaddling notion he had excogitated about Horace's versification, to which I paid all the less attention, as my eyes were then following Blanche, who was engaged in a deep conversation with Captain Heath. Unfortunately, I betrayed my inattention, and he has not forgotten it. He is now distant and almost cold in his manner, and never mentions Horace. I must regain his confidence by some splendid emendation. If not, I must trust to Blanche to purchase my forgiveness.

The house is lightened of Mrs. Broughton and her niece, and young Lufton. I regret the last named; he has been useful to me, in losing seventy pounds to me after winning two ponies at billiards.

Yours ever, CECIL.

CHAPTER XII.

CECIL PUT TO THE TEST.

"You think me unjust to Mr. Chamberlayne," said Captain Heath one morning to Blanche, as they sat together in the drawing-room, discussing the character of her lover, "because you are so young and know so little of the world, that you trust appearances, and can not pierce beneath them."

"But I can not be mistaken in supposing him very good-hearted and wonderfully clever."

"He is good-tempered, not good-hearted; cleverish, but not clever. It is natural that you should mistake the characteristics of good temper for those of a good heart—most people do so."

"And is not a good temper a sign of a good heart?"

"No, my dear Blanche, not in the least; it is very often only the sign of a weak and indolent organization—sometimes of mere cold selfishness. You look indignant. I do not say it is a sign in him of selfishness, I only say it is no sign of goodness."

"But what makes you so illiberal toward him?"

"Illiberal! I am merely and strictly just. I do not like him, because he is weak and insincere."

"Insincere!"

"Yes; he toadies your father by pretending to care about Horace and your father's commentary, which he laughs at behind his back."

"It is your dislike," said Blanche, rising and coloring, "which distorts your usual candid judgment. You do not like him, and you misinterpret every thing. I won't have him abused. I like him very much—very much, and I can't sit and hear you talk so of him." She left the room.

Captain Heath did not stir. He had never seen such an exhibition of temper on the part of Blanche before. She was greatly moved, it was evident. And there could be but one cause for her agitation—that cause made the captain thoughtful.

The truth is, he loved Blanche, and now seemed for the first time to see that she loved Cecil. He had vaguely suspected it before. This was a confirmation. His lip quivered as he said, "She is perhaps right. My dislike may be groundless. I will try him."

Cecil shortly afterward sauntered in.

"Are you for a game of billiards?" said the captain.

Cecil stared at such an invitation from one whom he had never seen in the billiard-room since his arrival, but accepted, with some curiosity as to how the "solemn prig" would play.

The dislike was mutual; and mutually did they libel each other.

"By George! you play a first-rate game," said Cecil, amazed at the skill of his antagonist, whom he expected to find an indifferent hand.

"Yes, I play well," quietly answered the captain. "I used to play a great deal when with my regiment. But you are stronger at it than I am."

Cecil thought so, but would not acknowledge it. Nevertheless, the captain won three games in succession, which considerably irritated his antagonist, who began to swear at the chalk, to abuse the table, to change his cues frequently, and to throw the blame of his non-success upon any thing and every thing except his want of skill.

The captain, who was critically observing him throughout the game to see if his opinion was well or ill founded, smiled scornfully at all these ebullitions. He had judged rightly in assuming that the best moment for observing a man's real character is during a game of chance and skill combined. Then it is that a man unbends, and shows himself as he really is. The self-love is implicated; and, as both vanity and money are at stake, you see a mind acting under the impulsion of two of its most powerful stimulants. Cecil, who was both vain and weak, was betrayed into a hundred little expressions of his character; and, as he was also somewhat less than delicate—without being at all dishonorable—in money matters, he led the captain to think ill of him on that score.

Having made up his mind as to Cecil's real worth, he determined to put him to the trial on a matter in which he was himself directly interested.

"Have you ever played with Violet?" he asked. "She is a wonderful hand. But then she does every thing well. (I doubt whether I can make this cannon—yes, there it is.) What a splendid creature she is! Isn't she?"

"Splendid, indeed! They are all three lovely girls, though in such different styles."

"(How stands the game? Seven—love: good.) What a sad thing it is, though, to

think such girls should be absolutely without fortune. (Good stroke!)"

Cecil was chalking his cue when this bomb fell at his feet; he suspended that operation, and said—

"What do you mean by their having no fortune?"

"Why, the estate is entailed, and Vyner, who is already greatly in debt, will neither have saved any money to leave them when he dies, nor be able to give them any thing but their trousseaux when they marry."

"The devil!"

"(That's a teasing stroke: one of the worst losing hazards. You must take care.)"

This last remark, though applied to the game, was too applicable to Cecil's own condition for him not to wince. The captain's eye was upon him.

"What a d—d shame!" exclaimed Cecil, for a man with an entailed estate to make no provision for his children. It's positively monstrous!"

"Horrible, indeed!"

"Why, what is to become of them at his death?"

"They will be penniless," gravely replied the captain, as he sent the red ball whizzing into the pocket.

"I wonder he is not ashamed to look them in the face," said Cecil, duly impressed with the enormity.

"He trusts, I suppose, to their marrying rich men," carelessly added the captain. "(Game! I win every thing!)"

Cecil declined to play any longer. He went up into his own room, and locked himself in, there to review his situation, the aspect of which the recent intelligence had wonderfully altered.

Captain Heath shrugged his shoulders, quietly lighted a cigar, and strolled out, well satisfied with the result of his experiment.

Then he met Blanche, who came up to him, holding out her hand, and asking forgiveness.

"I was very naughty," she said, "but you have spoiled me so, that you must not be astonished if I do not behave myself to you as to my best friend. But the truth is, I was angry with you, and now I am angry with myself. Am I forgiven?"

He only pressed her hand, and looked the answer. She put her arm within his, and walked with him to the river, where they got into the boat, and he rowed her gently down. She prattled to him in her prettiest style all the way, for she was quite happy at having "made it up with her darling Captain Heath."

It should be observed, that, although he was no more than five-and-thirty, yet, to the girls, he was always an elderly man, they having known him from childhood. They were extremely fond of him, as he was of them; but they laughed outright at one of their companions asking Rose if there was any thing like flirtation between them.

"Flirtation!" exclaimed Rose. "Why, he is bald!"

The hair, indeed, was somewhat worn away above the forehead; but this was from the friction of his hussar cap, not from age.

No, no, my dear," continued Rose, "I make no havoc with the highly respectable but eminently-unfitted-for-flirtation race of papas and grandpapas. My Cupid is in no need of a *toupet*; and if I am to be shot, it shall not be with a gouty arrow. Captain Heath is handsome—or has been—and though his mustaches are as dark and silky as a guardsman's need be, yet he has one *leetle* defect—his age makes him respectable!"

In consequence of this notion, they neither thought of falling in love with him themselves, nor of the probability of his falling in love with them. They were, therefore, as unrestrained with him as with a brother or an uncle. Blanche was his especial favorite and constant companion. He knew well that she regarded him as too old to be loved, but trusted that her eyes would be opened to the fact, that there was really no great disparity between them.

"I have been playing billiards with Mr. Chamberlayne this morning," said the captain, as he rested on his oars, and allowed the stream to float them quietly down.

"You have? Then I hope your opinion is changed."

"So far from it, I prophesy that his attentions to you—which have been marked of late—will visibly decrease, until they relapse into mere insignificance. And all because I casually remarked that your father's estate, being entailed, and he being in debt, you and your sisters were portionless."

"And you suppose him capable of—oh! this is too bad. It is ungenerous."

"My dear Blanche, I may be wrong, but I fear I am not; let me not, however, be condemned till the event condemns me. Watch him!"

"You shall own you have calumniated him; the event shall prove it," she said, with great warmth.

A dark shade passed across his brow, and he rowed rapidly on. Not another word passed between them.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW A LOVER VACILLATES.

Cecil's reflections had not been cheering. Although he felt himself too much in love with Blanche to give her up because she was portionless, he was, at the same time, too well aware of his own slender resources to think of marrying upon them. Bred to luxurious habits, he was not one by whom poverty could be lightly treated.

The more he reflected, the more urgent it appeared to him that he should conquer his passion and save himself from perdition. Could Captain Heath have read what was passing in his rival's mind, he would have smiled grimly at this verification of his suspicions, and rejoiced in the success of an experiment which removed that rival from his path.

As Cecil descended into the drawing-room that day before dinner, he was struck painfully by the sight of Violet on the sofa, in exactly the same attitude—caressing Shot—as she had appeared to him on that afternoon when he had relinquished all idea of her. The coincidence affected him.

"There is a fate against my marrying into this family," he said to himself; "first one, and then the other."

Blanche was standing at the window, looking out. She turned her head toward him as he entered, and felt a little mortified to see him throw himself into a chair by the side of Rose, with whom he began a lively chat.

Captain Heath, who had watched this manœuvre, now looked at Blanche; but she, conscious of his gaze, avoided it, and again resumed her contemplation of the undulating lawn and woody distance.

Dinner was announced. Meredith Vyner, as usual, took Mrs. Langley Turner, Sir Harry Johnstone, Mrs. Vyner; and Tom Wincot, Violet. Cecil, to Rose's surprise, offered her his arm, which was natural enough, inasmuch as he had been talking to her up to that time; but still, as for many days he had invariably managed to take Blanche, she could not help remarking the circumstance.

Captain Heath walked up to Blanche, who remained at the window; her heart throbbing violently, her mind distracted with contradictory thoughts.

"Blanche," he said, tenderly, "we are the last."

"I shall not dine to-day," she said, angrily, hurt at the pity of his tone.

"My dear Blanche, do not betray yourself; do not give *him* reason to suppose his neglect can affect you."

She sighed, put her arm within his, and walked silently with him into the dining-room.

She sat opposite Cecil, who seemed more talkative than usual. No one remarked her silence—she seldom spoke at dinner, except to her neighbor. No one asked her if she were ill, though she sent away her plate each time untouched. Cecil and Captain Heath observed it; both with pain.

Keen were the pangs she suffered at this fulfillment of the captain's cruel prophecy, and bitterly did she at that moment hate him for having undeceived her. That Cecil avoided her was but too evident. That his neglect could have but the one motive Captain Heath had ascribed was never doubted; but she threw all the blame on the captain's officiousness in speaking about their want of fortune, and in fact, with all the unreasonableness of suffering, hated him as the proximate cause of her pain.

Captain Heath applauded his own sagacity as a reader of character, and rejoiced as a lover in the success of his calculation. But he rejoiced too soon. Like most men he had erred in his calculation, because he dealt with human nature as if it were simple, instead of being, as it really is, strangely complex; and as if one motive was not counteracted by another. This is the grand source of the errors committed by cunning people: they are said to be "too cunning" when they overreach themselves by what seems an artful and logically-reasoned calculation; but the truth is, they have not been cunning enough. They have planned their plans as if the mind of man were to be treated like a mathematical problem, not as a bundle of motives, of prejudices, and of passions. The plan may look admirable on paper; but then it is constructed on the assumption that the victim must needs be impelled by certain motives; whereas, when it comes into execution, we find that some other motives are brought into play, the existence of which was not allowed for in the calculation; and these entirely subvert the plan.

Captain Heath's plan erred in precisely this way. Judging Cecil's character in the main aright, he justly argued that such a man would shun poverty as a pestilence, because he was weak, and money is power; and that he would shrink from affronting the world with no other aid than his own right hand. He therefore concluded that an intimation of Vyner's affairs would be an effectual method of putting an end to Cecil's attentions.

Now this argument would have no flaw in it, if we assume that a man is led solely by prudential considerations: it would be perfect were men swayed solely by their reason. Cecil's *views* were precisely such as Captain Heath had suspected. But then Cecil had emotions, passions, senses—and these the captain had left out of the calculation. Yet these, which are the stronger powers in every breast, were to overthrow the captain's plan.

Cecil in his own room, surveying his situation, was a very different man from Cecil in the presence of his beloved, pained at the aspect of her pain, and conscience-stricken as he gazed upon her lovely, sorrowing face. His heart smote him for his selfishness, and he was asking himself whether he *could* give her up—whether poverty with her were not preferable to splendor with another, when he thought he saw something in the captain's look which betokened scornful triumph.

"Can he have deceived me? Does he wish to get me out of the way?" he said to himself. "Egad! I think so. The game at billiards this morning—that was mysterious. What could induce him to propose such a thing to me—he who never took the slightest notice of me before? He had some motive. And then his story about Vyner's affairs—fudge! I won't believe it, until I have it on better authority."

The ladies rose from the table.

"I shan't sit long over the wine," Cecil whispered to Blanche, as she passed him.

A sudden gleam irradiated her sweet face as she raised it toward him with a smile of exquisite joy and gratitude. That one word had rolled the heavy stone which was lying on her heart and gave the lie to all the "base insinuations of that odious Captain Heath."

'Twas thus she spoke of one she really loved, and who loved her more than any thing on earth!

The men drew their chairs closer together, and commenced that onslaught on the dessert which is characteristic of such moments.

"Have you never remarked," said Cecil, "that men refuse to touch fruit until the women retire, and then attack it as if their appetites had been sharpened by restraint?"

"It is, I pwesume, upon the pwinciple of compensation," said Tom Wincot. "Depwived of the fwuit of humanity, the gwapes, apwicots, and nectawines of life, we are thwown upon the fwuit of nature! I say, Cecil, isn't that vewy poetically expwessed?"

"Very. But I don't think much of the compensation myself. I should like the women to remain with us as they do abroad."

"That," said Meredith Vyner, "would spoil dinners. The pleasant part, is the conversation after the ladies have retired."

"Besides," objected Tom Wincot, "however pleasant the society of women, one can't be always with them. *Toujours perdwix!*"

"Toujours *de la* perdrix," interposed Vyner, glad of an opportunity of setting any one right. "If you must quote French, "quote it at least correctly."

"Isn't *toujours perdwix* cowect, Mr. Mewedith Vyner. I never heard it expwessed otherwise."

"No, sir, it is grossly incorrect. The phrase is attributed to Louis XV., who excused his conjugal inconstancy by saying, that although partridges might be a dainty dish, '*Mangez toujours de la perdrix, et vous en serez bien vite rassasié*, was his witty, but immoral remark. The claret is with you, Mr. Wincot."

"By the way," said Cecil, who was anxious to regain Vyner's good-will, by flattering his vanity, "I have a theory which I must call upon your stores of learning, Mr. Vyner, to assist me in developing." Vyner bowed, and with his forefinger and thumb prepared a pinch of snuff, while Cecil continued—"It was suggested to me by Talleyrand's witticism that language was given to man to *conceal* his thoughts."

"Talleyrand," said Vyner, gravely, "is not the author of that joke; though it is commonly attributed to him. The author is a man now * living in Paris, M. Harel, some of whose *bon mots* are the best I ever heard. I remember his describing to me M. Buloz, the proprietor of The Revue des Deux Mondes, and The Revue de Paris, as a man who was "l'âme de deux revues, avec *l'attention habile*, de n'en être jamais l'esprit."

"*L'attention habile*," exclaimed Cecil, laughing loudly, "is exquisite. To my theory, however."

"No, no; none of your theowies," said Wincot, "they are always pwepostewously exaggewated."

"You shall judge," replied Cecil. "In saying language was given to us to conceal our thoughts, M. Harel explained the construction of a great many words in all tongues. Thus demonstration is evidently derived from *demon*, the father of lies."

"That is vewy faw fetched. Pass the clawet."

"Then, again, Mr. Vyner will tell you," pursued Cecil, "that the Greek word to govern is ἀνάσσω, which is derived from ἀνάσσα, a queen, not from ἄναξ, a king. Now, you will admit, that to deduce the governing principle from the weaker sex, is only a bit of irony. The mildest possible symbol is used for the severest possible office, viz., government. The soft, delicious sway of woman who leads humanity by the nose, is not to be disputed. Bearded warriors, steel-clad priests, ambitious nobles, a ragged, mighty, and mysterious plebs, these no *single* arm could possibly subdue. And yet a king is necessary. Here the grand problem presents itself: how to force the governed to accept a governor?"

"Oh! pass the clawet!"

"The king," said Vyner, shutting his box, "is The Strongest. König, or Könning, or *canning*: he is the one who *can* rule."

"But," replied Cecil, "I maintain he *can't* rule: no man was ever strong enough to rule men. The true solution of the problem is, *that the first king was a woman.*"

"This is fuwiously widiculous!"

"Laugh! laugh! I am prepared to maintain that woman is weak, and *omnipotent because of her weakness*. She is girt with the proof armor of defenselessness. A man, you knock down, but who dares raise a hand against a woman?"

"Very true," suggested Vyner, "very true. What says Anacreon, whom Plato calls 'the wise?' Nature, he says, gave horns to bulls and a 'chasm of teeth to lions;' but when she came to furnish women with weapons,

τί οὖν δίδωσι; κάλλος.

Beauty, beauty was the tremendous arm which was to surpass all others."

"And formidably she uses it," continued Cecil. "To man's violence she opposes her 'defenselessnes'—and nails; to his strength she opposes her 'weakness'—and tongue."

"In support of your theory," said Vyner, "the French call a queen a *reine*; and we say the king *reigns*."

He chuckled prodigiously at this pun, which Cecil pronounced admirable.

"My theory of kingship is this," said Cecil. "The first king, as I said, was a woman. She ruled unruly men. She took to herself some male subject, helplessly strong; some 'brute of a man,' docile as a lamb; him she made her husband. Her people she ruled with smiles and promises, touchingly alluding, on all befitting occasions, to her helpless state. Her husband she ruled with scratches—"

"And *hysterics*," feelingly suggested Vyner.

"Well, a son was born—many sons, if you like; but one was her especial darling. Growing old and infirm, she declared her son should wield the scepter of the state in her name. Councilors demurred; she cajoled; they consented. Her son became regent. At her death he continued to govern—not in his name, but in hers. The king was symbol of the woman, and reigned vicariously. When we say the king reigns, we mean the king *queens* it."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Vyner, chuckling in anticipation of the joke; "and this is the explanation of Thiers's celebrated aphorism, '*le roi* REGNE, *et ne gouverne pas.*'"

"This explains also the Salic law; a curious example of the tendency of language to conceal the thoughts. A decree is enacted that no woman shall reign. That is to say, men preferred the symbol (man) to the reality (woman). They dreaded the divine right of mistresses—the autocratic absolutism of petticoats."

"And, pray, Mr. Chamberlayne," asked Vyner, "how do you explain the derivation of the French verb *tuer*, to kill, from the Latin *tueor*, to preserve?"

1840. He died in 1846.

"Nothing easier, upon my theory of the irony of language. What is death but preservation?"

"Bwavo! pwoceed. Pwove that."

"Is it not preservation from sickness and from sorrow, from debts, diseases, dull parties, and bores? Death preserves us, by rescuing our frames from mortality, and wafting our souls into the bosom of immortal life. Then look at the irony of our use of the word *preserves*, i. e. *places* where game is kept for indiscriminate *slaughter*; or else, *pots of luxurious sweets*, destined to bring children to an untimely end."

"Why," said Vyner, "do we call a sycophant a *toady?*"

"I really don't know."

"Because his sycophancy has its sonrce in τὸ δέος, *fear*," replied Vyner, delighted at the joke.

"Good!" said Cecil, laughing. "I accept the derivation: the irony is perfect, as a toad is the very *last* creature to accuse of sycophancy; he spits upon the world in an unbiased, and exasperating impartiality: hence the name. One of the things which has most struck me," he continued, "is the occasional urbanity of language—instance the word *question* for *torture*."

"Like Astyages in Herodotus," said Vyner, "politely counseling the herdsman not to desire to proceed to necessities, ἐς τὰς ἀνάγκας, which the man perfectly understands to mean torture. Consider also the *changes* which take place in words. 'Virtue' originally meant *manliness*. The Greek word ἀρετὴ is obviously derived from Ares (Mars), and meant *martialness*; it has now degenerated into *virtù*, a taste for cameos and pictures; and into *virtue*, a woman's fairest quality, but the farthest removed from martial excellence."

"This is all vewy ingenious pewhaps," said Tom Wincot; "but let us go to the ladies, and hear their theowies."

They rose from table. Vyner in evidently better disposition toward Cecil than he had been since the last Horatian discussion; Maxwell dull and stupid as ever; Captain Heath silent and reflective.

CHAPTER XIV.

JEALOUSY.

O, my lord, beware of Jealousy.
It is a green-eyed monster that doth mock
The food it eats on. *Othello.*

A BRIGHT smile from Blanche welcomed Cecil, as he passed from the dining-room to the drawing-room, and walked up to the piano at which she was sitting. He thought he had never seen her look so lovely; perhaps the remembrance of his having contemplated giving her up made him more sensible of her charms.

He took up her portfolio of loose music, and began turning over the sheets, as if seeking some particular song. She came to help him, and as she bent over the portfolio he whispered gently—

"Can you contrive to slip away unobserved, and meet me in the shrubbery? I have something of the deepest importance to communicate."

She trembled, but it was with delight, as she whispered, "Yes."

"Plead fatigue, and retire after tea."

He then moved away, and approaching Violet asked her if she remembered the name of a certain Neapolitan canzonette, which her sister Blanche had sung the other night; and on receiving a negative sat down by her side, and entered into conversation with her.

All the rest of the evening he sat by Violet, only occasionally addressing indifferent questions to Blanche. Captain Heath seeing this, and noticing a strange agitation in Blanche's manner, which she in vain endeavored to disguise, interpreted it according to his wishes, and sat down to a rubber at whist with great internal satisfaction.

"I have been thinking, Mr. Chamberlayne," said Meredith Vyner, shuffling the cards, "that even differences of pronunciation may assist your theory. Thus we English—a modest race—express our doubt by *skepticism*, deriving it from σκέψις deliberation. But the Scotch—a hard, dogmatic race—pronounce it *skeeptieism*, hereby deriving it from σκῆψις, intimating that a man *leans upon* his own opinion, and that his dissent from others is not a deliberation, but a walking-stick, wherewith he trudges onward to the truth."

"Mr. Chamberlayne," said Mrs. Meredith Vyner, "are we not to have some music from you this evening? Come, one of your charming Spanish songs."

"By the way," said Vyner, while Cecil tuned his guitar, "talking of Spanish songs reminds me of a passage I met in a Spanish play this morning, in which the author says,

Sin zelos amor
Es estar sin alma el cuerpo.

What say you to that, ladies? It means that love without jealousy is a body without soul. *Immane quantum discrepat!*"

"Love has nothing whatever to do with jealousy," said Violet; "and so far from jealousy being the soul of love, I should say it was only the contemptible part of our nature that feels jealousy, and only the highest part of our nature that feels love."

"No one will agree with you, my dear Violet," said Mrs. Langley Turner. "Sir Harry, it is your deal."

"Perhaps not," said Violet.

"I should vewy much like to hear Miss Violet's pwoof of her wemark. I have always wead that jealousy is insepawable fwom love; though, I confess, I never expewienced jealousy myself."

"Nor love either—eh?" said Rose.

"That is sewere, Miss Wose! Do you pwetend that I never felt that sensation which ewewy man has felt?"

"If you mean love," replied Rose, "I say that if you have felt it, I imagine it has only been just the beginning."

"Twue, twue!"

"And like the charity of other people, your love has begun at home!"

"Miss Wose, Miss Wose!" said Tom Wincot, shaking his finger at the laughing girl.

"So that, if you have ever been jealous," she continued, "you must have an exaggerated susceptibility."

"And why an exaggewated susceptibility?"

"Because jealous of a person no other earthly being would think of disputing with you—your own!"

This sally produced a hearty laugh, and Tom Wincot, turning to Violet, said—

"I'm afwaid of your sister Wose's wepawtees, so shall not pwolong the discussion; but pway explain your pwevious weflection on jealousy."

"I mean," said Violet, "that jealousy has its source in egotism; love, on the contrary, has its source in sympathy: hence it is that the manifestations of the one are always contemptible—of the other always noble and beautiful."

"And I," said Maxwell, his dark face lighting up with a savage expression, "think that jealousy is the most natural instinctive feeling we possess. The man or woman who is not jealous, does not know what it is to love."

"That is a mere assertion, Mr. Maxwell: can you prove it?"

"Prove it? easily! What is jealousy but a fear of losing what we hold most dearly? Look at a dog over a bone; if you approach him he will growl, though you may have no intention of taking away his bone—your presence is enough to excite his fear and anger. If you attempt to snatch it, though in play, then he will bite."

"You are speaking of *dogs*," said Violet, haughtily—"I spoke of *men*."

"The feeling is the same in both," retorted Maxwell.

"Yes, when men resemble dogs. I spoke of men who possessed the higher qualities."

"Curiously enough," observed Vyner, "the Spaniards, whose jealousy is proverbial, and whose great poet, Calderon, has expressed himself in the almost diabolical manner just mentioned, these Spaniards have no word which properly means jealousy. *Zelos* is only the plural of *zelo*—zeal."

"I do not think, papa, you are quite correct," said Violet, "when you say the Spaniards are more jealous than other nations."

"They have the character, my dear."

"I am quite aware of it. But what one nation says of another is seldom accurate. If I understand jealousy, it is the sort of passion which would be *felt* quite as readily by northerns as by southerns, though it would not be *expressed* in so vehement a manner; but because one man uses a knife, when another man uses a court of law, that does not make a difference in the sentiments."

"I agree with Violet," said Captain Heath; "it seems to me that jealousy is a mean and debasing passion, whatever may be the cause which excites it. To suspect the woman whom you love, and who loves you, is so degrading, both to her and to you, that a man who suspects, without overwhelming evidence, must be strangely deficient in nobility of soul; and suppose the evidence complete—suppose that she loves another—even then a noble soul arms itself with fortitude, and, instead of wailing like a querulous child, accepts with courage the fate which no peevishness can avert. The love that is gone can not be recalled by jealousy. A man should say with Othello—

> I'll see before I doubt; when I doubt, prove;
> And on the doubt there is no more but this—
> Away at once with love and jealousy."

He looked for Blanche as he concluded this speech, but she had already retired to her room.

Cecil sang, but soon left off; and pleading "heartburn," caught at the advice of Tom Wincot, who assured him that a "stwong cigar was the best wemedy for it," and strolled out into the grounds to smoke.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LOVERS MEET.

> And in my heart, fair angel, chaste and wise,
> I love you: start not, speak not, answer not.
> I love you.
>
> HEYWOOD.—*A Woman killed with Kindness.*

It was a lovely night. The full harvest moon shed a soft brilliance over the far-stretching meadow lands; the sky was dotted with small patches of light, fleecy cloud, and a few dim stars. All was hushed in that repose which lends a solemn grandeur to a night-scene, when the sky, the stars, the silence—things suggestive of infinity—become the objects of contemplation.

Cecil was not one to remain indifferent to such a scene: his painter's eye and poet's heart were equally open to its mild splendor. The tall trees standing dark against the sky, and the dim outline of the woody heights around, no more escaped his notice than the picturesquely grouped cattle, one of which, a dun cow, with large, white face and chest, stood motionless amidst her recumbent companions.

Although he could not resist the first burst of admiration, Cecil was in no mood to luxuriate in the poetry of such a scene, as he would have done at any other time; but, striking into the thick and shadowy shrubbery, delicately checkered with interspaces of moonlight, he began to consider the object of this nocturnal ramble.

It would be difficult to explain the motive which impelled him to make this assignation. It was one of the sudden inspirations of passion, which defeat whole months of calculated prudence. Nothing could have been more opposed to his calculations than any thing like an express declaration, until he had ascertained the truth of what Captain Heath had asserted. And although he rose from the table with the resolution to be on his guard, and to watch closely the state of affairs, his first act, as we have seen, was one of consummate imprudence—one which inextricably entangled him in the very net from which he was anxious to keep away. Now, upon Captain Heath's view of his character, this was little less than madness—in short, it was unintelligible. But it is intelligible enough upon a more comprehensive view of human character; as every one will acknowledge who has ever stood beside the girl he loves, in a room full of people—the very restraint of the place sharpens desire, and makes the timid bold. Hence one reason why so

many more declarations are made in ball-rooms, and at parties, than in *tête-à-têtes*.

Certain it is that Cecil, standing beside Blanche, looking over the same portfolio, their hands occasionally touching, their eyes occasionally meeting, was in no condition to listen to the dictates of reason. A tumult of desire beat at his heart. He was standing within that atmosphere (if I may use the word) which surrounds the beloved, and which, as by a magnetic power, inconceivably stirs the voluptuousness latent in every soul. He was within the halo which encircled her, and was dazzled by its luster. Irresistibly urged by his passion to call this lovely creature his own, he could not forego bringing things to a crisis; and he made the assignation. Her consent enchanted him. He was in a fever of impatience for her to retire; he cursed the lagging time for its slowness; and, with a thrill of delight, found himself in the open air, about to hear from Blanche's own lips that which her eyes had so frequently expressed.

In a few minutes, all this impatience and delight subsided. He had gained his point—Blanche had consented to meet him, and he had contrived to come to the rendezvous without awakening any suspicion. Now, for the first time, he began to consider seriously the object of that meeting. He was calm now, and grew calmer the more he pondered.

"What an ass I have been!" he thought. "What the devil could induce me to forget myself so far?' She will come, expecting to hear me declare myself. But I can't marry her—I can't offer her beggary as a return for her love. If Heath should have told the truth—d—n it, he can't be such an unfeeling egotist as not to make *some* provision for his children! No, no; I'll not believe *that*. A few thousands he must in common decency have set aside, or he would never be able to look honest men in the face. Besides, Vyner doesn't appear to be particularly selfish. However, it *may* be true, and if so——

"Can I invent something of importance to communicate instead of my love? Let me see. That will look so odd—to make an assignation for any other purpose than *the* one! But she doesn't come. Can she be hesitating? I wish her fears would get the better!

"She won't come. That will release me from the difficulty. It is the best thing that could happen.

"I see a light in her room. What is she doing? Struggling with herself perhaps; or perhaps waiting till the coast is clear. D—n the cigar; out again!"

Upon what slight foundations sometimes hang the most important events!

That is rather a profound remark; not positively new, perhaps, but singularly true. It has escaped from my pen, and as a pencil mark of approbation is sure to be made against it in every copy in every circulating library, why should I hesitate to let it go forth?

A fine essay might be written entitled, "The Philosophy of Life, as collected from the *marked passages* in modern novels." And I offer the essayist, the remark above, as his opening aphorism.

But I digress.

The situation which suggested the foregoing aphorism was curious enough to warrant my writing it; for had Blanche appeared at the rendezvous at this time, or a few minutes earlier, it is most likely, from the frame of mind in which her lover then was, that he would have made some shuffling excuse or other, and declared any thing to her but his love. But she hesitated. With a coyness natural to the sex, she shrunk back from that which she most desired. Nothing would have given her greater pleasure than to hear Cecil swear he loved her, and yet she trembled at the idea of meeting him to hear it said.

She kept him waiting half an hour.

Whoever has been accustomed to analyze his own feelings, will at once foresee that Cecil, after coming to the determination that he had acted with consummate folly in making the assignation, now began to get uneasy at the idea of her not keeping it. Obstacles irritate desires. If "the course of true love" does not "run smooth," so much the deeper will it run. Cecil, willing enough to blame himself for his rashness, now began to feel piqued at her indifference. Ten minutes before the sight of her coming from the house would have been painful; now he was irritated by her absence. He was several times on the point of sulkily going back to the drawing-room; but the thought "if she should come" arrested him.

She came at last, and his heart leaped as he beheld her.

"Have I kept you long?" she asked.

"Every minute away from you is an hour. But you are with me now," he replied, as he folded her to his breast and kissed her burning lips.

Having expressed what was in their hearts by this long, eloquent embrace, he twined his arm round her waist, and clasping her hand in his, walked slowly with her to the river-side.

While they are thus lovingly employed, I wish to make one remark on the superiority of actions to words. Here were two lovers morally certain of each other's affection, but wanting the confirmation of an oath. They met for the express purpose of saying, in good set terms, that which only wanted the ratification of words; and instead of saying any thing on the subject they allowed a kiss—and very eloquent such kisses are—to settle the matter. What could they have said which would have so well expressed it?

Although they walked down to the river, and sat upon the trunk of a fallen tree to admire the shimmer of moonlight upon the gently running stream, and the cool, crisp, delightful sound of the water as it dashed over the huge stones that formed a weir, and then fell over, in guise of a little waterfall, they made no allusion to the "important communication" which had drawn them both out. They had too much to talk about. They had to confess when it was their love began, and vow that it would never end. They had the most charming confidences to make respecting what had been done and said by each, and what each had felt thereat; confidences which though full of "eloquent music to them, may very well be spared here.

Nor did they much admire the river by moon-

light, in spite of its brilliant tracks of light, and dusky patches of shade thrown from the overhanging trees; hand clasped in hand, they looked into each other's eyes, from which no landscape in the world could have seduced them.

Oh, what exquisite bliss was crowded into that brief hour! How their pulses throbbed, and their hearts bounded! How their souls looked from out their eyes, as if to plunge into an indissoluble union! A strange fire burnt in their veins, and made them almost faint with pleasure too intense for mortal endurance. He crushed her hand in his with almost savage fury, and she returned the pressure.

Love! divine delirium, exquisite pain! rich as thou art in rapture, potent as thou art o'er the witcheries of moments which reveal to mortal sense some glimpses of immortal bliss, thou hast no such *second* moment as that which succeeds the first avowal of two passionate natures. Other joys thou hast in store, but no repetition of this one thrilling ecstasy.

Love has its virginity—its bloom—its first, but perishable melody, which sounds but once, and then is heard no more. This melody was now sounding in their hearts, as, seated on that fallen trunk, they heeded the world no more than the moonlit stream which glided at their feet. One hour of intense, suffocating, overwhelming rapture did they pass together; an hour never to be forgotten; an hour worth a life.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE DISCOVERY.

How silver sweet sound lovers' tongues by night!
Like softest music to attending ears.

Romeo and Juliet.

Leaving the lovers to their rapture, let us glance in at the warm drawing-room, and at the philosophic whist-table: Captain Heath is standing with his back to the fire; Tom Wincot having "cut in" in his place; Violet and Rose are knitting.

"Blanche, my dear," said Meredith Vyner.

"She has gone to bed, papa," said Rose.

"Oh, very well. Is Mr. Chamberlayne come in? No! Our deal, is it not?"

This little fragment of the conversation suddenly made Captain Heath suspicious. He was before aware that Blanche and Cecil were absent; but he had not before coupled their two exits in his own mind, so as to draw therefrom a conclusion. "Can they have arranged this?" flashed across his brain. He quietly left the room, took his hat, and walked out. Though by no means of a jealous disposition, he could not help commenting in his own mind on a hundred insignificant traits of what appeared to him Blanche's passion for Cecil, and the conclusion he drew from them was, that she not only loved him, but studiously concealed her love. As he said, with him "once to be in doubt was once to be resolved;" his was none of that petty, querulous jealousy, irritated at self-inflicted tortures, and yet too weak to finish them by making doubts certainties. Like a brave man, as he was, he paused not an instant in endeavoring to arrive at certitude in all things. Instead, therefore, of worrying himself with doubts and arguments, with hopes that she might not love Cecil, and fears that she did, he determined to settle the point, and place it beyond a doubt.

He had not gone far when his quick ears detected the indistinct murmur of conversation. He paused for a moment, and leaned against a tree. A cold perspiration stood on his brow; a feeling of sickness, which he could not subdue, arrested him; the first spasm of despair clutched his heart, as the murmur fell upon his ear, and told him that what he had suspected was the truth.

That he might not be mistaken; that he might not act without thorough conviction, he approached still closer to the spot from whence the murmur came, and there he saw the lovers seated under the dark branches of a gigantic larch, which served to make Blanche's white dress more visible.

Little did that happy pair suspect with what heart-broken interest they were contemplated. They pressed each other's hand, and repeated endless variations of that phrase, of all phrases most dulcet to mortal ear, "I love you;" and if they thought at all, thought themselves forgotten by the world they so entirely forgot.

In the midst of their dreamy bliss, a low, half-stifled sob startled them. They sprang up. She clung tremblingly to him. He looked eagerly around, piercing through the shadowy pathways with a glance of terror. He could discover nothing. All was silent. Nothing stirred.

"Did you not hear a groan?" he whispered.

"It seemed like a sob."

"All is silent; I see no one. Listen!"

They listened for some seconds; not a sound was audible.

"It must have been fancy," he said.

"No; I heard it too plainly."

"Perhaps it was a noise made by one of the cows yonder."

"At any rate, let us go in. Do you return by the shrubbery. I will go round by the garden."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SACRIFICE.

I know I love in vain—strive against hope—
Yet in this captious and intenible sieve
I still pour out the waters of my love,
And lack not to love still.

Shakespeare.—*All's Well that End's Well.*

When Cecil re-entered the drawing-room, he found it exactly as he had left it, except that Tom Wincot was playing whist in place of Captain Heath, who stood leaning against the mantle-piece, with his left hand caressing the shaggy head of Shot; that favored animal stood with his fore-paws resting on the fender, and his face raised inquiringly, as if to ascertain the reason of his friend's paleness. Pale, indeed, was the handsome face of that brave, sorrowing man; and the keen sympathy of the hound had read in its rigidity and calmness the signs of suffering, which escaped the notice of every one else. True it is that the captain somewhat

shielded his face from observation, by, with his left hand, twirling his mustache, a practice too habitual with him to call forth any remark.

Cecil was in such a state of excitement, that the girls remarked it. He joked, laughed joyously at the most trivial observation, sang with prodigious fervor, and declared there was nothing like a moonlight ramble for the cure of the heartburn.

"It seems to have been the heart-*ache*," said Rose, "by the exuberance of your spirits after the cure."

Cecil looked up, and seeing her saucy smile, and her eyes swimming in laughter, knew that she was not serious, so he asked what should make his heart ache.

"Ay, ay," said Vyner, "what, indeed? *quo beatus vulnere?* If you have discovered, let us hear it."

"Yes, yes, tell us his secwet, by all means," said Wincot, throwing down his last card; "two by honors, thwee by twicks—game—that makes a single, a tweble, and the wub: six points!"

"No, no," said Rose, shaking her head, "I shall not say it now."

"Pray, don't spare me," said Cecil. "I am quite sure it was something satirical."

"It was; but I don't choose to say it now."

Captain Heath continued to pat Shot's head; but he neither looked up, nor joined in the conversation. Cecil, who had several times endeavored in vain to make him talk, left him at last to his reflections, whispering to Rose—

"He is too grave for our frivolities."

Cecil's excitement continued all the evening. He slept well that night, cradled in enchanting dreams.

What Blanche felt as she stole up to her own room, rapidly undressed herself, and crept into bed, I leave to my young and pretty readers to conjecture.

The next evening, though they had several brief snatches of *tête-à-tête* during the day, our lovers were again to indulge in a moonlight ramble, hoping no doubt for a repetition of the first. Blanche early pleaded fatigue, and declared her intention of soon retiring for the night.

"Don't go to bed as you did last night," said Captain Heath; "if you are weary, take a turn with me in the shrubbery: there is a lovely moon."

Blanche colored deeply, and kept her eyes fixed upon her work. Cecil looked at him, as if to read the hidden meaning of those words.

It was a moment of suspense. The entrance of tea enabled them to hide their emotions; and, by occasioning a change of seats, brought the captain close to Blanche.

"How imprudent you are!" he whispered. "Accept my offer of a walk, and *he* shall accompany us; when we are out of sight, I will leave you; but by all three going out together, no suspicion will be raised."

Blanche trembled and blushed, but made no answer. The discovery of her last night's interview was implied in what he said; and with that was implied this other fact, which then for the first time, flashed across her mind: Captain Heath loved her. It was his sob which had startled them.

If, amidst her compassion for his unhappy love, there was mixed some secret gratification at having excited that passion, no one will speak harshly of her; it would be too much to expect human nature should be insensible to the flattery of affection. But, flattered as she was by the discovery, she was also sensible of the noble delicacy of his conduct in the matter; and when she raised her humid eyes to look her thanks, it was with a severe pang that she noticed the alteration in his appearance. One night had added ten years to his age.

"Miss Blanche and I are going to stroll out and enjoy the harvest moon," said Captain Heath about half an hour afterward to Cecil, "will you join us?"

Cecil looked amazed, and felt inclined to throw him out of the window for his proposition, but Blanche made a sign to him to accept, and he accepted.

"And I suppose I am not to come?" said Rose.

"Certainly—if you like," replied the captain.

"No, you may go without me. *Three* is company, and two is none," she said, parodying the popular phrase, "and if I came we should be two and two."

The captain did not press the matter, but offering Blanche his arm, led her out, followed by Cecil, somewhat sulky, and not at all comprehending the affair.

"There, now I surrender her to your charge," said the captain, when they were within hearing of the waterfall, "having saved your meeting from suspicion. Continue your walk, I am here as sentinel."

He seated himself upon a gate with all the quietness of the most ordinary transaction. Cecil, who was a good deal annoyed at this interference of a third party, made no reply; he was not even grateful for the service rendered.

Blanche, who knew what it must have cost the captain thus to sacrifice his own feelings, and think only of her safety, took his hand in hers, and kissed it silently. A tear fell on it as he withdrew it.

"Make the most of your time," he said.

In another instant he was alone.

The intense gratification he felt in making this sacrifice will be appreciated by those who know what it is to forego their own claims in favor of another—to trample on their own egotisms, and act as their conscience approves. The mixture of pain only added to the intensity of the delight; as perhaps no enjoyment is ever perfect, physical or moral, without the keen sense of pain thrown in as a zest.

His greatest hope in life was gone, and yet he sat there not torn by miserable jealousy, but warmed with the glow of self-sacrifice. And this is the meaning of virtue being its own reward: had he acted with only ordinary meanness, had he done what hundreds and hundreds would have done in his place, he would have suffered tortures all the more horrible, because unavailing. Instead of that, he looked courageously into the grim countenance of misfortune, saw that he was not loved, that another had received the heart he

coveted, and having seen that, he determined to stifle the mighty hunger of his heart, to give up all futile hope, and to devote himself to her happiness in such ways as he could forward it.

The lovers, with the selfishness of lovers, had speedily forgotten him and every one else. But, although they sat upon the self-same tree; although they clasped each other by the hand, and looked into each other's eyes, their interview was cold compared with that of the night before.

One reason might be, that on that night they talked of love; on this, they talked of marriage. Cecil explained to her the state of his affairs, and asked her if she could leave her present luxurious home to share his humbler one.

This question is *always* asked under those circumstances; though the questioner knows very well that it is pre-eminently superfluous, and that there is but one possible answer, conveyed in a look and a kiss. The answer, however, is agreeable enough to warrant the question; is it not?

Lovers are singularly insincere with each other, and play at doubts—and sometimes very offensive doubts—with an air of earnestness which would imply considerable duplicity, were it not one of the *instincts* of passion. The truth is, love loves to hear the assurance of love; and to hear this assurance, of which it is already sure, it pretends to have doubts, merely to have them removed.

Let us forgive Cecil his insincerity in asking Blanche that question; and let us pass over in silence all the others which he asked, and to which he got the same sweet answer. They remained there a long while; at least it seemed so to their sentinel; to them it seemed too brief. But they rose at a signal he gave; and when they came up with him, he said, gravely, "Mr. Chamberlayne, I trust you will take what I am about to say with the same candor as I say it. I am anxious to serve you, not to lecture you. Although, therefore, I know nothing of the reasons which you may have for keeping your mutual attachment secret, I am strongly of opinion that the best and wisest thing you can do is to make it public at once. Ask her father's consent, but do not be discovered in clandestine meetings. If you desire it, I will break the matter to Mr. Vyner, and plead your cause to the best of my ability."

This was received in complete silence. Cecil was alarmed; Blanche kept her eyes fixed on him.

"Reflect upon it," added the captain, as he led the way to the house.

Some inexplicable foreboding damped Cecil's spirits at the idea of declaring to her father his affection for Blanche; and this foreboding was realized in the course of the evening by Vyner casually mentioning, in his hearing, that which Captain Heath had already informed him of, respecting the portionless state of the girls.

"So I tell my girls," he added, "they must keep strict guard over their hearts, to be sure they give them to no beggar. The more so" (here he looked at Cecil) "because, if they felt inclined to make fools of themselves, I certainly should not allow them to do so."

The thought occurred to Cecil, "Can Heath have betrayed me? and is that speech leveled at me?"

He looked at the captain to read the treachery on his brow; but that calm, honest face triumphantly withstood the scrutiny; and Cecil no longer accused him.

The truth is, Vyner did suspect that Cecil was paying too great attention to Blanche, and had leveled his speech at him, imagining that the hint would be taken. Since that morning when the most splendid discovery on the Horatian metres ever made, had been so ill appreciated, Vyner ceased to regard him with the same pleasure as before; and in criticising his actions, observed his attentions to Blanche.

"You see how fatal your counsel would be," whispered Cecil to the captain, as he took his candle and retired for the night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CECIL IN HIS TRUE COLORS.

Cecil reached his own room with savage sullenness. He had asked Blanche if she would share his poverty, and was delighted with her answer: but—strange paradox—he had never seriously thought of sharing it with her; and now his perplexity was how to escape from his present dilemma. To marry upon his means was impossible; impossible also to think of giving her up. To trust for one moment to Vyner's liberality, he felt was futile; the mere avowal of his attachment would be sufficient to close the doors against him forever.

Angrily he paced up and down his room, striving in vain to detect some means of extricating himself. A fierce and contemptible struggle between passion and interest agitated him: sometimes love prevailed, and sometimes prudence.

In the midst of this self-struggle Captain Heath came in.

"I have come to speak with you," he said, "and trust you will regard me as Blanche's elder brother, anxious to befriend you, but still more anxious to protect her. Will you treat with me on those terms?"

"Certainly. You have already discovered our secret—how, I know not—and there can be no impropriety in consulting with you; I have perfect confidence in you."

"Your confidence is deserved. Now tell me; you have yourself heard from Vyner what I told you in the billiard-room. I told it you, because I saw in what direction you turned your eyes, and wished you to have a clear comprehension of the family affairs. Had only your fancy been touched, my warning would have been in time; as it was, your heart was engaged, and my warning came too late. I do not repent it, however, the more so as it served to show me the strength of your love. Pardon me for having misjudged you," holding out his hand, "but I imagined that what I said respecting Blanche's poverty would at once put a stop to your attentions. You have shown me how ill I judged you. Will this confession, while it convinces you of my sincerity, also purchase my forgiveness?"

Cecil colored with shame, and pressed the outstretched hand in silence.

"Now to your affairs. You wish to keep your attachment a secret. For what purpose? How can it avail you? It must be discovered, and then you will have lost all the advantages of openness."

"But what am I to do? Vyner will never give his consent. I am too poor."

"If I may ask without indiscretion—what is your income? What are your prospects?"

"My income is the interest of four thousand pounds; my prospects are vague enough. I have some talent. Painting and literature are open to me; but I should prefer diplomacy."

"You can not marry on such prospects."

"No, indeed! But what am I to do?"

"I have but one suggestion to make. My brother is chairman to a railway now in course of formation. The secretaryship is worth four hundred a year. If you will accept of it, I think, by exerting myself, I could secure it for you."

"I am much obliged to you," replied Cecil, coldly; "but that is not at all in my way."

"You refuse?" said the astonished captain. "Refuse four hundred a year?"

"Remember I am a gentleman's son," he said, haughtily, "and you will appreciate my refusal."

"Upon my word, I do appreciate it, and at its real value! Here, I offer you what certainly I should never have thought of offering you, had it not been for *her* sake, a situation which thousands of gentlemen's sons would be delighted to accept, a situation which, with your own small property, will enable you to live in decent comfort, and you refuse it?"

"Really, your officious indignation," said Cecil, getting angry in his turn, "is somewhat out of place. You meant kindly, I dare say; but once for all, allow me to observe, that I neither am, nor ever will be, a *quill-driver*."

"Not even for *her* sake?"

"No; for no one will I degrade myself in my own eyes. If I must work, it will be in some gentlemanly department. I will either paint or write for my livelihood, when I *am* condemned to gain it."

"And you pretend to love her?"

"I do; but I am sure she would be the first to dissuade me from such a degradation as you propose. She has given her heart to a gentleman, and not to a clerk."

"Bah! you talk in the language of a century ago. The pride which was then, perhaps, excusable, becomes simply ridiculous nowadays."

"And you, captain, are using language which, if it continues, I shall demand an explanation—"

"You threaten?"

"I have no wish to do so; but the tone you adopt is such as I can no longer permit."

"Well, I did not come to quarrel with you, so will abstain from criticism. Only, let me ask you what you propose to do?"

"I propose nothing; I am totally at a loss."

"You positively refuse my offer?"

"Positively."

"You do not think of marrying upon your present means?"

"Decidedly not."

"Then you have but one course: to relinquish your claim."

"I have thought of that."

As this confession escaped him, a sudden light shone in the captain's eyes, a sparkle of unexpected triumph, which did not escape his rival.

It was a double betrayal. Cecil betrayed his selfishness—the captain his love.

"I have thought of it," he repeated, "but I can not make the sacrifice. I love her too much. It may be selfish, but I feel it impossible to give her up."

He watched the captain's countenance with malicious joy as he spoke this, conscious that every phrase was an arrow to pierce his rival's heart.

"But you must decide either to marry her, or—"

"Or," interrupted Cecil, with a sneer, "relinquish my claim in your favor, eh?"

Captain Heath shook slightly, and then fixing his full gaze upon Cecil, said, quietly—

"How little you know the man whom you so wantonly insult!"

He left the room.

"*He* loves her," said Cecil to himself, bewildered at the discovery. "Loves her! What, then, is the meaning of his conduct? He acts as sentinel during our interview—takes upon himself to break the matter to her father, if I wish it—offers me a situation to enable me to marry. Oh! it is preposterous! I should be a fool, indeed, to believe it! Loves her! loves her and assists a rival! There is some cunning scheme in all this. I can not divine *what* it is, but I am certain *that* it is."

"He loves her. Let me see: first, he endeavors to frighten me away by explaining the state of Vyner's affairs. That is intelligible enough; he wanted me to take the alarm and decamp. Failing in that, he suddenly changes tactics, and officiously thrusts himself between us as a patron and protector. The scoundrel!"

Yes, scoundrel! for doing that which, in its simple heroism, so distances all ordinary actions, that it looks like a meanness. Thus are men judged. If a man perform some act of ostentatious grandeur, the town will ring with loud applause; but unless the act is striking, and the motive clearly intelligible, he is sure to be maligned. Men only credit in others the kind of virtue they feel capable of themselves; as Sallust says of the readers of history—"ubi de magnâ virtute et gloriâ bonorum memores quæ sibi quisque facilia factu putat, æquo animo accipit; supra ea veluti ficta pro falsis ducit."

Captain Heath's self-sacrifice was one demanding the greatest moral fortitude, precisely because it had no adventitious aid from the anticipation of applause; it required an immense effort, and could have no eclat. It was a victory to be gained after a fierce combat, and to be followed by no flourish of trumpets. Strength of mind gained the victory; and the pleasure derived from all exercise of strength was the reward.

Although I uphold such actions as heroic, as springing from true moral greatness, and worthy of our deepest reverence, yet it must not be supposed that there is any thing marvelous in this self-abnegation. The followers of De la Rochefoucauld might find out egotism even here, if they used their cold scalpel aright.

They might say Captain Heath was convinced that Blanche loved another, and all his efforts to prevent that would be useless. Finding himself thus completely excluded from all hope of obtaining her, he made up his mind to the defeat, and instead of allowing himself to be made miserable by idle regrets and idler jealousy, he gave himself the delight of assisting her.

To Cecil, however, who was certainly so incapable of such conduct as to be incapable of believing it, the captain was evidently a scoundrel, whom he would first outwit and then challenge.

To outwit him, he determined to carry Blanche off.

Cecil, vacillating between his passion and his prudence, between his love for Blanche and his horror at poverty, suddenly lost all hesitation, the instant he was aware of a rival. The selfishness which had made him unwilling to encounter poverty, to rush into the great battle of life, there to gain a footing for the sake of Blanche, now made him ready to run all risks for the sake of triumphing over a rival. No suggestions assailed him now respecting the imprudence of marriage; no horrors at bringing a family into the world without the means of properly providing for them; no thought of what *she* would suffer now disturbed him, as it had before. And why? because it then was only a mask under which he hid the face of his own selfishness from himself. The one absorbing thought was how to quickly call her his; how to irrevocably bind her to him.

"He thinks to dupe me, does he? He shall find out his mistake. I will this instant go to her, and arrange our flight"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PERILS OF ONE NIGHT.

Words that weep, and tears that speak.
COWLEY.

BLANCHE's bed-room formed the angle of the right wing at the back of the Hall. Her window looked upon the terrace. Between the right wing and the offices ran an arcade, as a sort of a connecting link. The top of this arcade formed an open gallery with heavy balustrades, and paved with dark iron-gray tiles. A small side-door opened on to it from the bed-room; and frequently in summer did Blanche sit out in this gallery to enjoy the cool night-air, or, leaning against the balustrade, gazed at the heavy curtain of clouds—

"While the rare stars rush'd thro' them dim and fast."

At the end of the interior of the arcade was a niche, in which were generally kept some of the girls' gardening tools, and a slight ladder which they used.

Blanche was still dressed, as the light in her bed-room told Cecil, who had stolen out in pursuance of the resolution recorded in the last chapter. She was seated on the side of her bed in an attitude of delicious reverie, her head slightly drooping, her hands carelessly fallen on her lap, when the sound of a pebble striking against the window-pane startled her. Again that sound—and again! She rose and went to the window. The sky was overcast, and the night was dark; but after a few seconds she recognized Cecil, and opened the window.

"Are you dressed, dearest?"

"Yes."

"Then come out into the gallery; I want to speak to you. I can get up by the ladder."

"Very well, but be careful."

She closed the window, and stepped out. He placed the top of the ladder against the pediment of the arcade, and quickly ascended.

They rushed into each other's arms of course. Lovers always do that directly they are together, no matter what important business brings them there.

"Blanche, my beloved, are you willing to share my fate, whatever that may be?"

"Have you run all this risk to ask me that?" she said, reproachfully.

"No; but I must ask it you—and in saddest seriousness—before I speak further."

Her lips sought his, and pressed them ardently.

"Our secret is discovered—your father even suspects it—we must fly—will you be mine? —Hush! what is that?—hush!—I heard a door shut.—Hark! yes, a footstep—do you not hear it?—a hurried step.—It comes this way—good God! what shall we do?"

Blanche trembled with fright, as the heavy sounds of an approaching step smote upon her ears; but, with a sudden inspiration, she dragged Cecil into her room, and opening her window, leaned out, as if star-gazing, though the sky was starless. At length the sharp ring of the footsteps upon the stone terrace was heard, and a male figure was dimly visible. It came right opposite the window.

"Blanche! not yet in bed? said Captain Heath; "and breathing the autumnal night-air too?"

She shook slightly, but answered, "Yes. The night-air cools me."

Cecil was greatly agitated, but held his breath and listened. Nothing more was said for some seconds; at last Blanche asked him what brought him out so late.

"Inability to remain in doors. I have just had an interview with *him*, which has greatly agitated me. He showed himself selfish, foolish, contemptible."

Cecil was on the point of starting up, but restrained himself, on remembering where he was. Blanche was hurt, and replied, "Silence on that subject. Remember you are speaking of one who is to be my husband."

"God forbid!" he exclaimed.

She closed the discussion by shutting her window.

He moved away; but had not taken four steps, when the ladder caught his eye. The position of the ladder, coupled with Blanche at the open window, still dressed, at that hour of the night, at once convinced him that an elopement was meditated. A sick faintness overcame him for a moment; but it was only for a single moment. He rallied immediately, and taking the ladder on his shoulder, he carried it off.

Willing as he was to assist his rival in every

honorable way, he could not, after that evening's conversation with him, think of allowing an elopement, which must not only deprive them of any chance of assistance from her father, but also, by an unseemly precipitation, plunge them both into a difficulty it was his care, as Blanche's protector, to save them from. Having carried away their ladder, he then proceeded to the lodge-gates to see if a post-chaise was in waiting.

Meanwhile, the lovers had recovered from their agitation, and were arranging their plans of escape for the following night. The first tremor of modesty Blanche felt, on becoming aware that she had introduced Cecil into her bed-room, was completely set aside—the more so as, with a delicacy which often distinguished this weak, selfish, but still, in many respects, admirable man, Cecil kept himself at a distance from her, and though holding her hand, did not even raise it to his lips. By that mute language which is more eloquent than words, he had assured her that the situation only increased his respect, and that nothing should make him take a base advantage of her momentary forgetfulness.

There was something deeply interesting and even touching in the situation of these two lovers. Shut up in a bed-room with him at midnight, she was as sacred in his eyes as she would have been in broad daylight, and surrounded by friends. She felt her security; and this gave a frankness and tenderness to her manner, which plainly spoke her thanks.

He felt also the charm of the situation, but with the charm, the danger, and therefore dared not keep his eyes from her, dared not look upon the bed or toilet-table, and strove by looking only at her to forget the place.

Modest and respectful as his attitude was, there was an exquisite feeling engendered by that situation which he had never felt before, and which those will comprehend who have trembled with secret pleasure at the delicious nothings—an accidental touch of the hand—the contact of a ringlet against the cheek—nothings which love invests with an incomparable charm. It is like a coy lingering at the gates of paradise whose splendor the soul anticipates with delicious awe.

But the time fled rapidly, and the first cold streaks of dawn, struggling with the faint starlight, warned him he must depart, ere it seemed to him that he had said all there was to say. Repeating every detail of their plan once more, they arose. He timidly offered her his lips, as begging but not demanding a kiss, and she threw herself into his arms. There was gratitude in her embrace, though she knew not for what. Her innocence concealed from her the perilous situation she had gone through; but her instinct told her confusedly that she had been spared. He pressed her closer to him, and felt a thousand-fold repaid.

She opened the door, and they stepped out into the gallery. Horror stiffened their features as they missed the ladder. "Gone! gone!" he hoarsely whispered. "Then, we are lost. It's that meddler, Heath!—He knew I was in your room, and he took that method of—But I'll be revenged. The scoundrel!"

Blanche was too terrified to weep; she did nothing but wring her hands piteously.

What was to be done? The arcade was too high to allow him to drop; and yet there seemed to be no other mode of escape possible.

It was a moment of horrible suspense.

"Heath loves you, Blanche," he said presently, with a certain fierceness in his tone.

"I know it," she said sadly.

There was a pause. She watched his countenance with anxiety: angry passions seemed drifting over his soul like the clouds over a stormy sky; and she, not understanding the tortures of jealousy, of hate, of revenge, of fierce resolutions as quickly chased away as formed, which then agitated him, looked with trembling at his distorted face.

"By God!" he suddenly exclaimed, "I will triumph yet."

Then seizing her by the waist, he carried her back again into the room.

"Cecil, Cecil," she said, "let me go. What do you mean? Cecil, you alarm me—set me down."

He tried to stop her mouth, but she struggled in his grasp, from which she at length freed herself.

"Blanche," he said, "we are betrayed. We shall be separated forever—forever! There is but one way to prevent it, but one way to defy them."

He approached her, but she eluded his grasp, and said: "Oh! dearest, dearest Cecil! do not—do not outrage the memory of this night, hitherto so sacred—do not lower me in your eyes, and my own."

"It must be—it shall be—"

"No, no; do not say it!"

"It is our only hope," he said, as he again clasped her in his arms.

"Cecil, Cecil, I am yours—yours only will I be—can you doubt it?—but, oh! leave me now! leave me! leave me!"

She sank at his feet, raising her hands imploringly, and wept.

He was touched. The sight of this lovely girl thus passionate in her sorrow, kneeling at his feet, and imploring his pity, was more than he could withstand. All the wild passion and gross instincts which had been roused, were now calmed again with the rapidity which is usual in such moments of delirious excitement, when the soul seems not only susceptible of every influence bad or good, but also susceptible of the most violent and rapid changes.

He threw himself on a chair, and bade her rise.

"God bless you! God bless you for that word!" she sobbed. "There spoke my own Cecil."

He was silent and humiliated. The flaring light of the candles just expiring in the socket, told her that they would soon be in darkness; and she shuddered at the thought, though not daring to disturb the sullen meditation in which he was indulging, by any prayer to him to depart. Each time the wayward light in its capricious action seemed on the point of being extinguished, a thrill of horror ran over her. The returning brightness brought returning courage.

Silent he sat,

Still as any stone,

His eyes fixed on the floor, a prey to a sort of

remorseful, stupid anger, not only at having been foiled, but at finding himself helpless in the dilemma.

One of the candles went out. Only a feeble, vascillating glimmer was shed by the other; but it was enough to show him that Blanche had fainted. The emotions of the night had so enfeebled her, that the terror of approaching darkness made her senseless.

"I have killed her!" was the horrible thought that presented itself to his mind. He sprang forward, raised her in his arms, and looked eagerly into her ashy-pale countenance.

The second candle went out, and left them in obscurity, which the delicate tints of early morning, peering through the window-curtains, scarcely lessened.

He dragged her out into the gallery, where, in a few minutes, the keen air of morning revived her. On coming to herself, she saw the cold gray sky above, and Cecil's anxious face bending down to catch the first glimpse of returning life. A sweet sigh burst from her as she closed her eyes again, and leaned her head upon his shoulder. It was like awaking from a nightmare!

In a few minutes she was sufficiently revived to be able to stand. Not a word passed; but her eyes were most eloquent, as in mute thankfulness, she fixed them on his agitated face.

Perhaps in all the emotions of that eventful night, there had been none which rivaled, in peculiar and indescribable delight, their present sense of subsided agitation and terror. A heavenly calmness had descended upon their spirits. It was like the hushed stillness which succeeds a storm, when the only sound is that of the gentle dripping of rain-drops from the leaves. Their feelings were in harmony with the scene. The twittering of a few early birds made them sensible of the deep repose and quiet of the hour; and the pale streaks of golden light mixed with the heavy clouds which, during the night, had lowered from the sky, not inaptly represented the streaks of light which in their own souls drove away the clouds of darkness and tempest.

While in the mute enjoyment of this scene, they were suddenly alarmed by the appearance of a man emerging from the wood. Another glance assured them it was Captain Heath; and to avoid being seen, they returned to the bed-room.

"Heath is still prowling about," said Cecil to her. "No doubt on the watch; so if any means could be devised of my descending on to the terrace, he would be certain to see me. I must make a bold venture, and go through the house. At this early hour no one can be awake. I will take off my boots, and creep noiselessly along."

Captain Heath was returning, trying to persuade himself that the ladder placed against the arcade was purely accidental. No traces of a post-chaise were to be seen; and, after all, was not an elopement most improbable when his interview with Cecil was kept in mind?

It may seem strange that one capable of assisting his rival, should feel so hurt at the thought of an elopement. Yet the shock had almost unmanned him. He roamed about, like a criminal in a condemned cell, endeavoring to persuade himself that his doom can not be executed—that a reprieve must come. The truth is—and let it not impeach his heroism, but rather enhance it, by showing how great was his sacrifice—he had not fortitude enough to bear the blow when it fell. He had made up his mind to see his beloved the wife of another; but he had not made up his mind to see it so suddenly. Resigned to his fate, he had not imagined his doom so near its execution. Perhaps in the secret recesses of his soul, there were vague, unexpressed hopes that *something* might occur to prevent the marriage—that Vyner would refuse—that Cecil would repent. In short, the vicissitudes of life opened to him a hope; and faint as that hope might be, we know at what reeds the sinking man will snatch.

Rather than believe in an elopement, he made up his mind to the position of the ladder being an accident; and resolved, at length, to seek his couch in sleep to forget the troubles of his soul.

His bed-room was situated at the corner of a corridor, at the end of which was Blanche's room. His hand was upon the lock, and the door ajar, when, emerging from the corridor, Cecil turned the corner, and came full upon his rival.

What a look was that darted from each startled and indignant face at this encounter! Both were speechless—both deadly pale; the muscles frightfully rigid; the eyes—oh! who shall describe the lightnings of their terrible eyes, glaring at each other like famished jaguars!

It was but a look, and they separated.

In that look of horror, of rage, of triumph, and despair, Cecil concentrated all the hate and jealousy he felt, as well as all the triumph in the pain he was inflicting—and Captain Heath all the anguish at the discovery of his rival having passed the night in Blanche's room, and despair at the irremediable destruction of all his hopes.

Throughout the varied scenes of after life, that look was never altogether forgotten; from time to time it would rise in the memory, recalling with it all the poignant sensations which the emotions of years could not efface.

Not a word passed between them. The captain went into his room, and closed the door. Cecil crept to his room, and threw himself undressed upon the bed; there, worn out with the excitement of the last few hours, he sank into a deep and dreamless sleep.

Watching the flood of light gradually spreading over the sky—watching, to use Browning's fine expression,

> Day, like a mighty river, flowing in,

Captain Heath sat forlorn at his window—sleepless, motionless, hopeless—measuring, with cruel calmness, the wreck of all his hopes; and, with stoic bitterness, the extent of his suffering—learning to look his misery in the face; learning to stifle every vain regret; learning to bear with manly courage that which no unmanly wailing could alleviate.

Before he rose, he felt, with the poet, that

> Meeting what must be
> Is half commanding it.

CHAPTER XX.

CAPTAIN HEATH WATCHES OVER BLANCHE.

The next day, Blanche kept to her room, pleading illness. Nothing passed between Cecil and the captain—not even a look: they studiously avoided each other.

By mere accident, the captain overheard one of the grooms tell another that he had seen Mr. Chamberlayne at the Crown Inn that day. It was a flash of light to him. The visit to the Crown could only have been for the purpose of securing a post-chaise. He resolved to watch.

During the evening, Cecil was as gay as usual, if not gayer; but he was closely watched by the captain, and, when he retired for the night, he made so many arrangements with Violet and Tom Wincot for the morrow, that the captain's suspicions were confirmed.

"They are to elope to-night," he said—and quietly stole out of the house.

About two hundred yards from the lodge gates, beneath the shade of a magnificent horse-chestnut, he espied, as he had anticipated, a post-chaise in waiting. He went up to the post-boy, and, holding up a crown, he said—

"Will you answer a question, if paid for it?"

"Why, sir, that depends upon the sort of question."

"You are employed by Mr. Chamberlayne—I want to know whether you are going toward London or Bristol; will you tell me?—five shillings for you, if you tell me truly; broken bones on your return, if you deceive me."

"Hm! you're not going to spoil my job?"

"Not I—I wish simply to know the fact."

"Well, then, hand here the money—it's to London."

The captain trembled.

"To London! I thought so."

This information seemed to lend him an energy he had not felt for some time—the energy necessary for a struggle. Had Cecil been going to Gretna Green, the captain would have suffered him to depart in peace. But certain suspicions of foul play had tormented him ever since his meeting with Cecil at his bed-room door.

"The villain!" he said to himself. "He has accomplished her ruin, and now does not even intend to marry her. But *she* has a protector, thank God!—I will shoot the reprobate this very night."

He moved away, and, retiring behind the hedge, carefully examined his pistols, which he had brought with him, anticipating some use for them.

Meanwhile, Cecil was placing the ladder for Blanche to descend.

"Hark ye!" said Captain Heath, again approaching the postillion. "As London is your route, I propose accompanying you. There is a crown, to insure your blindness. I shall get up behind. When you arrive at the first stage, you will promise to pass the word on to the postillion who succeeds you; he shall have half-a crown for his silence; and so on, till we reach London. Is it a bargain?"

"Ay, surely, sir."

"Well, I will walk on. When you get beyond the village, and reach the clump of fir-trees that skirt the road to the right of Mrs. St. John's—you know it?"

"Yes, sir."

"There some part of the harness must get out of order, and you must dismount to set it right. While doing so, I will get up behind, and then you may drive on as fast as you please. D'ye hear?"

"Yes, sir; all right."

"Let me add, by way of precaution, that, in case you should ride past, or attempt to betray me, I am very capable of sending a bullet through your head."

He drew out from his pocket one of his pistols, much to the postillion's horror, and then replacing it, said—

"Now we understand each other."

He strode rapidly on, as he finished this speech, and was soon out of sight.

The night is cold, and the postillion gets impatient; the more so, as the recent little conversation has not helped to raise his spirits. To earn a crown by a facile blindness is tempting enough; but he has an uneasy apprehension of something unpleasant; he dislikes the company of one who carries pistols, and seems so determined to use them on slight provocation.

But why tarry the lovers? It is long past the appointed time.

Can they have been detected?—Is the elopement frustrated?

Captain Heath anxiously asks himself these questions; and perhaps the reader shares his impatience. He has a readier means of satisfying his curiosity, however, than the captain had; for he has only to turn to the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE ELOPEMENT DELAYED.

Gallop apace, you fiery-footed steeds
Toward Phœbus' mansion; such a wagoner
As Phaëton would whip you to the west.
Come, gentle night; come, loving black browed night,
Give me my Romeo. *Romeo and Juliet.*

Captain Heath and the postillion were not the only persons impatient at the unexpected delay. Cecil leaning against a tree, watching with anxious eyes the window of Blanche's bed-room for the signal, and counting the weary minutes, as they dragged with immeasurable tediousness through their course of sixty seconds, began at length to suppose that she would never come.

Nor was the unhappy Blanche herself the least impatient of the four. The whole mystery of the delay was the presence of Violet in her room. She had repeatedly announced her intention of going to bed, but Violet gave no signs of retiring, and their conversation continued.

It more than once occurred to her to place Violet in her confidence, but certain misgivings restrained her. The fact is, Blanche had been uneasy at Cecil's attentions to Violet, during the first period of their acquaintance with him; an uneasiness which she now understood to have been jealousy; and naturally felt reluctant to speak of her engagement to one who had almost been her sister's lover.

It happened that Cecil's name came up during

their conversation, and Violet turning her large eyes upon her sister's face, said—

"Shall I tell you my suspicion, Blanche? Cecil Chamberlayne is fast falling in love with you: you color; you know it then? perhaps return it? Oh, for God's sake, tell me that you do not return it!"

"Why should I not?" replied Blanche, greatly hurt.

"My poor Blanche!" said Violet, tenderly kissing her, "I have hurt you, but it is with a surgeon's knife, which inflicts pain to save pain. If it is not too late—if you are only at the brink of the abyss, not *in* it—let me implore you to draw back, and to examine your situation calmly. Oh! do not waste your heart on such a man."

There was an earnestness in her manner which only made her language more galling, and Blanche somewhat pettishly replied—

"You did not *always* think so. At one time *you* were near *wasting* your heart, as you call it, upon him."

"I was," gravely replied Violet, "and a fortunate accident opened my eyes in time. You, who seem to have watched me so closely, may have noticed that for some time I have ceased to encourage his attentions."

"Since he has ceased to pay them," retorted Blanche.

Violet smiled a scornful smile.

Neither spoke for a few minutes.

"I have a great mind to ascend the ladder," said the impatient Cecil to himself, "and see if it is only womanly weakness which detains her."

"Can they have been detected?" Captain Heath asked himself for the twentieth time.

"Blanche," said Violet at last, "you greatly misunderstand me; but what is worse, you greatly misunderstand *him*. Listen!"

She then narrated the whole of her episode with Cecil: her first yearnings toward him—her interest, and almost love; then the scene at the Grange; his conduct in the affair with the bull; she recalled to Blanche the mutual coldness which must have been observed until after Cecil's confession respecting his cowardice, which so far cleared him in her eyes, that she was amiable to him for the rest of the evening; she then told of her reflections made that night when alone, and the result to which she had arrived, and concluded by saying—

"I am most willing to admit his fascinating manners, his varied accomplishments, and some good qualities; but he is weak, selfish, and capricious. He is not a proper husband for you, the more so as he is poor, and has not the character which will enable him to battle with the world. Rich, he would not make you a good husband; poor, he will be a curse to you, and throw the blame of his misery upon you."

Blanche remained perfectly quiet during this dissection of her lover's character, and not a change in her countenance betrayed that it had in the least affected her. Nor had it. Perfectly incredulous, she listened to her sister, seeing only the distortion of prejudice in her language.

"Have you finished, Violet?" she quietly asked.

"I have."

"Then give me a night to consider."

"Yes, consider it calmly; think of the man on whom you are about to bestow your affections, and ask yourself seriously. Is he the man I ought to choose? Good night, Blanche!"

"Good-night. God bless you!" said Blanche, hugging her fervently, which Violet attributed to the emotion excited by their conversation, but which really was the embrace of parting.

A few minutes afterward, Blanche was descending the ladder, a small packet in her hand, and was received in the arms of her impatient lover.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW THEY WENT TO LONDON.

How the old post-chaise rattled merrily along the hard road, as if conscious of the precious burden which it bore! There was no moon: the sky was overcast. Lights glimmered from the windows of distant houses at rare intervals; and the watch-dog's lonely bark was occasionally heard—a sort of mournful sound, which told how deep the night had gone.

With what wild passion—with what inextinguishable delight, the lovers pressed close to each other, in that rumbling chaise! The sense of peril and of escape was mixed with the indescribable rapture of two beings conscious that all barriers are borne down, and that they at length belong to each other.

Away! away! from home, with its restraints, its perils and its doubts—far into the wide world of love and hope!—from father, sisters, friends—from luxuries and comforts, cheaply held by those who know not the reverse—to the protecting bosom of a husband, dearer than all the world beside; and with him to begin the battle of life, which love will make an everlasting triumph!

Away goes the rumbling chaise! too slowly for its inmates, whose impatience needs wings; too swiftly for the wretched man, who sits behind, communing with his own bitter thoughts.

What a slight partition divided the delirious lovers from the unhappy wretch who rode behind them—a partition which divided the joys of paradise from the pangs of purgatory. The captain had not only to endure the misery of unhappy love, but also the, to him, horrible torture of believing the girl he had loved had given herself up to a villain who did not intend to marry her.

"If I *do* force him to marry her," he said, "what happiness can she expect from such a scoundrel? Her character will be saved; but her heart will be broken.—If he refuses—if I shoot him—she will hate me—will not less revere his memory—and will have lost her name!"

And merrily the chaise rattled on.

It reached London at last. There the captain got down, and hailing a cab, bade the driver follow the post-chaise, at a slight distance. It stopped at an hotel. They alighted and went in.

The captain followed them to the hotel. His

first act was to write this letter to Meredith Vyner.

"(*Don't read this aloud.*)

"My Dear Vyner,

"Before this reaches you, the flight of your daughter with Chamberlayne will have been known to you. Make yourself as easy as possible under the deplorable calamity; for, I am in the same hotel with them, and will see them duly married.

"You will be astonished to hear me talk of their marriage, and of my forwarding it, instead of taking every step to prevent it. But, when I tell you that marriage is now *imperative*—that it is, alas! what we must all now eagerly desire—my conduct will be intelligible. Put your perfect trust in me. You know my affection for your children, and my regard for the honor of the family."

Great, indeed, was the consternation at the Hall, on the morning when the flight was discovered. At first it was imagined Blanche had gone off with Captain Heath; but when Cecil's absence was also discovered, the real state of the case was acknowledged. But the captain's absence still remained a mystery. That he should be implicated in the elopement, seemed impossible. His known dislike to Cecil, and his great regard for the whole family, contradicted such a suspicion. Yet wherefore was he not forthcoming?

This threw such a mystery over the whole affair, they knew not what conclusion to form; some doubts began to arise as to whether it really was an elopement. Such matters were not usually managed by three persons. And yet the moonlight ramble by the three on the preceding evening, did not that look as if there were some understanding between them?

To this Rose objected, that as they had been willing to accept of her company, it was evident there could have been nothing in it beyond a mere ramble.

It was observable that the one who suggested and most warmly maintained the probability of there being no elopement in the case, but only perhaps some bit of fun, was Mrs. Meredith Vyner, who absolutely dissuaded her husband from taking any steps toward pursuing the fugitives, by this reasoning—

"Either they have eloped, or they are executing some joke. I incline to the latter; but even admitting the former, you know, dear, it is perfectly useless your following them, until you know what route they have taken, and as yet we have got no clew whatever. While you are hurrying to Gretna, they may be quietly housed in London, and so you have all the bother and agitation for nothing."

Like all indolent men, Vyner was glad to have an excuse for sitting still and doing nothing. But what was Mrs. Vyner's motive for dissuading him? Simply this: she believed in the elopement, and was delighted at it. Not only was there one daughter "off her hands"—one rival the less—but by the act of setting her father's consent at defiance, she gave him the power of refusing to give any dowry, or even a trousseau, with something like an excuse for so doing. Mrs. Vyner had already run her husband too deeply into debt, not to keep a sharp eye on any means of economy that did not affect her comforts or caprices; and money spent upon "her dear girls," was always considered worse than lost.

On the arrival of Captain Heath's letter, all the mystery was revealed; and great was the talk it occasioned!

CHAPTER XXIII

CECIL'S JEALOUSY.

A husband's jealousy, which cunning men would pass upon their wives for a compliment, is the worst can be made them; for indeed it is a compliment to their beauty, but an affront to their honor.

Wycherley: *The Gentleman Dancing Master.*

The captain had just sealed his letter when he saw Cecil leave the hotel alone. He determined to profit by the opportunity, and seek Blanche. He found her writing.

As she recognized him, she gave a low scream, and then springing up, she exclaimed—

"Is my father with you? Oh! intercede for us. Gain his consent."

"I am alone, Blanche."

"Alone?"

"I came with you from Wytton. The same carriage brought us both; you rode inside, and I behind."

"What!—is—what! are you going to—?"

"To watch over you, dear Blanche, as a brother would. To *force* him to marry you."

"*Force!* why, what do you mean? Cecil is but this instant gone for the license."

"Are you *sure* of that?"

"Sure? *He* said so; and shall I doubt his word?"

"Why then did he bring you here? Why did he not take you to Gretna?"

"Because he feared we might be pursued, and they would be sure to follow that route."

"Hm! Yes, it is possible. And *till* you are married?"

"I am to stay with an old lady—a relation of his. He will prepare her to receive me this morning."

He sighed. So strange is human nature, that the idea of Cecil behaving delicately and honorably in the transaction, was at first a disappointment and an additional grief to him! He could not bear to think his rival less contemptible than he had held him to be, nor could he with pleasure find that his own services were *not* needed. Blanche wanted no protector. Nevertheless, partly out of a lingering suspicion that all would not go on so smoothly as it promised, and partly from the very want he felt to consider himself of some use to his beloved Blanche, he refused entirely to credit her statement of Cecil's intentions, and declared that he would remain to watch.

"At any rate, allow me to give you away," he said, "I shall then be sure that all is right. Can you refuse me?"

She held out her hand to him by way of answer. He raised it respectfully to his lips, gazed sorrowfully at her, and withdrew.

When Cecil returned, and learned from her that the captain was in the same hotel, that he

had seen Blanche, and that she had consented to his giving her away, he stormed with rage.

"Heath again! Is the viper always to be in my path, and imagine I shall not crush him at last? What is the meaning of his thrusting himself between us?" he asked her, with great fierceness. "What the devil is at the bottom of it? What makes him so anxious to have you married? I am a beggar, and he knows it; yet first one thing, then the other, he has nothing but schemes to make me marry you. Wanted me to be a quill-driver, that I might be rich enough to marry. Marry, marry, marry! By God! there is something in it which I will discover."

"Cecil, dearest Cecil, you terrify me!"

He paced angrily up and down the room, without attending to her. A horrible suspicion had taken possession of his mind: he thought that Captain Heath had not only been her lover, but that his passion had been returned, and that it was to conceal the consequences of their guilty love that a marriage with any one seemed so desirable.

"I see it all," he said to himself, as he strode about the room; "they have selected me as their gull. It is a collusion. From whom, but from her, should he have known we had taken that moonlight stroll in the shrubbery? Why should he take upon himself the office of sentinel? Why offer me a situation? Why follow us up to town? How should he know we were to elope? Why should he, in God's name, be anxious to have her married, when it is quite clear he loves her, or has loved her, himself? He owned it last night—owned that he loved her! I do believe, when he carried off the ladder, he knew I was in the room, and adopted that mode of making me irretrievably commit myself.—But it is not too late.—We are not married yet!"

How curiously passion colors facts! No one will say that Cecil had not what is called abundant "evidence" for his suspicion, and the evidence was coherent enough to justify to his own mind all that he thought. It is constantly so in life. We set out with a presumption, and all the "facts" fit in so well with the presumption, that we forget it is after all not the *facts*, but the *interpretation* which is the important thing we seek, and instead of seeking this, we have begun by assuming it; whereas, had we assumed some other interpretation, we should, perhaps, have found the facts quite as significant, although the second interpretation would be diametrically opposed to the former.

Had Cecil, instead of seeking for corroborative facts to pamper his own irritable jealousy, just asked himself whether the characters of Blanche and the captain were not quite sufficient of themselves to throw discredit on any suspicion of the kind—whether, indeed, he ought to entertain such an idea of such persons, unless overwhelmed by the most clear, precise, unequivocal evidence—he would have saved himself all the tortures of jealousy, and would not have desecrated the worship of his love by thoughts so debasing and so odious.

Blanche, perfectly bewildered, sat silent and trembling, keeping her eyes fixed upon the strangely altered bearing of her lover.

Stopping from his agitated walk, he suddenly stood still, folded his arms, gazed at her with quiet fierceness, and said—

"As Captain Heath takes so much interest in you, perhaps he will have no objection to escort you back to your father."

"Cecil!—Cecil!—In Heaven's name, *what* do you mean?" she said, half rising from her chair; but, afraid to trust her trembling limbs, she sank back again, and looked at him in helpless astonishment.

"My meaning is very plain, very," he said, with intense coldness. "You are free to return to your family, or not to return, if you prefer remaining with Captain Heath. Perhaps," he added, sarcastically, "as he is so partial to marriage, he will marry you himself."

She strove to speak, but a choking sensation at the throat prevented her. She saw him leave the room without having strength to recall him, without even making a motion to prevent him.

In mute despair, she heard his heavy tread upon the stairs, and like a person stunned, felt no command of her faculties, scarcely felt any thing beyond a stupid, bewildering prostration of the soul.

With flushed face and heated brain, Cecil rushed into the street, and wandered distractedly away. The fresh air somewhat cooled his burning brow, and the exercise gradually enabled him to recover his self-possession. He began to doubt whether he had not been rash in his suspicions.

"It is quite true that Heath has taken a most extraordinary part in the whole affair; but I remember now, that, during our interview in my room, he seemed by no means anxious I should marry her; indeed I taunted him with wishing to get me out of the way. He offered me the secretaryship to enable me to marry, and when I refused that, he set his face against—I have been an ass!—

"And yet his conduct is inexplicable. He loves her, and she knows it.—What a web entangles me!—I will return and question her; she can not deceive me—she is not altogether lost—I will try her."

With this purpose he returned.

Meanwhile, Captain Heath had found Blanche weeping bitterly, under the degrading accusation of Cecil's jealousy; and having extorted from her some incoherent sentences, which made him aware of what had passed, he said, "My dear Blanche, I am going to bid you have courage for an act of fortitude. You must struggle with yourself—you must reason calmly for a moment."

"Oh, tell me, tell me what to do. How shall I eradicate his suspicions?"

"You can not do it. In one so weak and capricious—one who could think so unworthily of you, and upon such ridiculous appearances—jealousy is incurable. It will bring endless misery upon you. It will destroy all love, all confidence. If he suspects you already, what is to secure you from his suspicions hereafter? Blanche, you must quit this. Return with me to your father's; he will receive you kindly."

"No, no, no," sobbed the unhappy girl."

"Yes, Blanche. It is a hard alternative, but it is the best. You ought to rejoice in *his*

injustice, because it displays him in his true colors. He tells you what you have to expect."

"I love him."

"Alas! I know it; but you see how he repays your love."

She only sobbed in answer.

"He will make you miserable forever. Now, before the irrevocable step is taken, release yourself from such a fate: return with me."

She wept, but could not speak.

Heath's arguments at last prevailed; and, in a tone of terrible despair, she exclaimed, "Take me home, then."

A flash of joy passed over his sad face as he heard this heart-broken phrase, which assured him that, however his beloved Blanche might suffer at first, she was at least saved from the certain misery of becoming the wife of Cecil Chamberlayne.

On reaching the hotel, Cecil ran rapidly upstairs, and on the first landing stood aghast, at seeing Blanche coming down, leaning on the captain's arm. She was weeping, and her face was hidden by the handkerchief with which she wiped her eyes.

"Where are you taking her?" Cecil fiercely asked.

"Home," was the stern reply.

"Home! Whose home? yours!"

"To her father."

"And by whose authority?" he said, in a low, hoarse, almost suffocated voice.

"Her own," was the crushing answer.

They passed on.

Cecil, amazed, bewildered, could merely utter, in a tone of sad and reproachful inquiry, "Blanche!"

A stifled, agonizing sob burst from her; but clinging closer to her protector, she hurried him on.

Cecil leaned against the banister for support. As Blanche reached the bottom of the stairs, she could not resist giving a parting look; and the anguish of the face which then met her eye so completely changed her feelings, that, forgetting all Captain Heath had said, she flew up the stairs, and threw herself into Cecil's arms, exclaiming, "My own beloved, you will not send me from you?"

He pressed her frantically to his heart, and carried her back to their apartment.

Captain Heath's face was contracted by a fearful spasm as he slowly sought his own room. Once more were his hopes crushed; once more had he to renounce the visions of exquisite bliss which filled his soul. On the point of forever separating Blanche from her unworthy lover, as he had imagined, and with the opening which that separation made for his own future prospects, he now again saw that the struggle was useless, and that Blanche was irretrievably lost to him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DENOUEMENT.

Four days afterward, Meredith Vyner received this letter—

"They are married at last; and are now gone to Broadstairs for the honeymoon. It is a sad affair; but it was inevitable. May she be happy!

"I was to have given her away; but, from some caprice on his part, it was not permitted; and the office was performed by one of his club friends, a certain Mr. Forrester. I was present, however, though not invited. From one of the side pews I witnessed the ceremony. The last words of dear Blanche were, that I should intercede for her with you; which, God knows, I would, did I think that a father's heart needed the intercession! But your kind nature is quite assurance enough to me.

"I am forced to go to Italy, to join my brother; and, as I have no time to lose, Mrs. Vyner will, I dare say, excuse my taking formal leave. Pray, let my trunks be packed, and forwarded to me, at Southampton, where I shall be tomorrow.

"You shall hear further from me soon; now I am too busy to write more."

In the calm tone of this letter there is the same stoicism which always enabled this brave man, if not to conquer, at least to conceal his emotions. Who could have suspected the misery which really lay concealed in those few lines?

The adroitness with which he recommended Blanche to her father's generosity, showed how affection will sharpen the wits, and make even the most candid people cunning, to attain their ends. He knew that Mrs. Vyner had too much need of money, not to grudge any bestowed upon the girls; and that Vyner himself was little likely to suffer his regard for his child, such as it was, to withstand his wife's persuasion. Therefore, to have pleaded in Blanche's favor, would have been to call down certain defeat. Instead of that, he adroitly assumed that Vyner could not need any intercession—could not, as a father, do otherwise than pardon his daughter. To refuse that pardon, would therefore be to act contrary to all expectation. The question was thus not discussed, but settled.

The second point in his letter is, the journey to Italy; that needs only a very brief comment; he hoped, in the confusion of foreign scenes, to distract his thoughts from grief.

Farewell, then, thou brave, honest, self-sacrificing man! May travel bring oblivion! may time bring consolation to thy sad and noble heart!

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

ROSE VYNER TO FANNY WORSLEY.

WYTTON HALL, 14*th Oct.*, 1840.

MY DEAR FANNY,

SINCE poor Blanche's unfortunate marriage—and yet why should I call it unfortunate? has she not married the man of her choice, and is not that the great ideal we maidens all aspire to? However, as it is the fashion here to speak of it as a "most unfortunate business," over which mamma weeps (I don't clearly see why) and papa storms, I have caught the trick, and called it so to you.

To resume this broken sentence; or rather to begin it anew: since Blanche's *fortunate* marriage, our days have passed equably enough; but although not characterized by any "incidents," nor affording any "news," they have not been stupid. Life has not been stagnant. The slow growth of passions has proceeded without interruption. Marmaduke Ashley has become the devoted slave of Violet. I call him her Brazilian Othello. I made her very angry yesterday, by telling her that she should be less cruelly haughty to him, "for is he not," said I, "*a man and a brother?*" They would make a superb couple, for although I tease her with references to gentlemen of color, and with congratulatory remarks respecting the chain being "broken, and Africa being free," you must know that his complexion is not really darker than that of a Spaniard, And you know how lovely *she* is—no you don't, you have not seen her since she shook off girlish things, and can not imagine how she has altered.

Poor Marmaduke, although he has made some impression on her, will have, I fear, to languish a long while ere the haughty beauty condescends to step down from her pedestal. Almost as long as I shall have to wait before the modest Julius will understand, without my being forced to tell him, that he is not absolutely indifferent to a certain saucy girl at whom he makes sweet eyes.

You can't imagine how, every day, my admiration deepens for the little man. I am always finding some new illustration of his excellence; always hearing something which confirms my opinion of his nobility of soul. Yesterday, I found that he was studying hard for the bar, not because he was without fortune, but because he would not consent to his mother being poorer at the death of his father than she had been before. He was the heir to all the property, except a jointure; but he refused to enter into possession while his mother lived, and as every man ought, he says, to be able to gain his own livelihood, he has determined to gain his at the bar.

He has recently been exerting himself to procure a good subscription list to a volume of poems. Here is the title. "GLOOMS AND GLEAMS. By one who has suffered."

I am as a weed
Torn from the rock, on ocean's foam to sail,
Where'er the wave or tempest's breath prevail.
BYRON.

The mysterious one—the one who has suffered (*what* not specified!) is a newly discovered wonder—the Sappho of Walton—the daughter of a linen-draper.

According to Julius she is really a clever, deserving girl, a little wild in her notions, but with all the generosity of genius, which redeems her affectations and her follies. She is too poor to venture on publication herself; and I have just found that Julius, unable to secure a sufficient sum by subscription, has undertaken to pay the printing expenses. He stipulated that this should be a secret; but her grateful father disclosed it to Mrs. Roberts (our housekeeper) who disclosed it to me. Imagine the gossip there will be in Walton over this publication! How the papas and mammas, the uncles and maiden aunts will moralize over the corruption of the age, and the wild, audacious vanity of their townswoman! A poetess in Walton! Why, a volume of poems—(unless they were low church effusions or the inspirations of "advanced Christians")—is itself a rarity. You know how slightly tainted with literature the small towns of England usually are? I doubt if any are so colorless, as Walton. Dickens penetrates here—where does not his genial sunshine penetrate?—but no other name of those blown from the brazenly impudent trumpet of fame has ever found an echo in Walton. A poetess is, consequently, looked upon as something short of a sorceress: a fearful and appalling illustration of the reckless march of intellect which devastates the world!

Julius has already secured her an influential patron in Sir Chetsom Chetsom, and his brother, Tom Chetsom. The baronet is possessor of the Dingles, a fine estate within three miles of Walton, and is looked up to as one of the great people of the county. Such a figure as he is! I must sketch him for your amusement.

Sir Chetsom Chetsom is not without considerable daring, for, with the weight of six or seven-and-sixty years upon his shoulders, he makes a gallant dash at thirty. His whiskers are miraculously black, always well oiled, and stiffly curled; his eyebrows are of another black, in virtue of his inheritance from nature; and his hair is of a third black in virtue of Truefit's well-directed efforts at *wigmanity*. This threefold darkness, unsuspicious of a gray hair, overshadows a sallow, wrinkled

brow and cheeks, upon which a hare's foot imitates the ruddy glow of youth, with a sort of Vauxhall-by-daylight splendor. Under the genuine eyebrows, float two colorless eyes, between which a high and well-shaped nose rears its haughty form. Frightfully regular teeth, without a speck, without a gap, fill up the gash which represents his mouth. A well-padded chest, and well-stayed waist, ending in shrunken legs, and excruciatingly tight-booted feet, complete the *physique* of this Adonis. His dress is a perpetual book of fashions!

Of the *morale* I know little, except that he never plays cards—flatters himself he has not come to that *yet*—talks fluently of valtzing (particular about sounding the *w* as *v*, as a young gentleman after his first German lesson), adores Fanny Elssler, calls Grisi a *naice leetle giarl enough*, thinks himself, and wishes to be accepted as a remorseless Lovelace, and is always afraid of talking too long with one woman, lest he should "compromise her."

This ferocious lady-killer, whom you will at once place among that very terrific and numerous class of men whom I have christened Murders, has a brother, whom I wonder he does not disown, so frankly does that brother bear his age. Tom Chetsom, "jolly Tom Chetsom," as he is called, is "a tun of a man," with a bald, shiny pate, fringed with straggling gray hair, a rubicund face, a vinous nose, and a moist, *oystery* eye, rolling in rheum, Yet this implacable exhibition of age in a younger brother, is tolerated by the baronet, who is blind enough, or stupid enough, not to be aware of the comment it is on his own resplendent juvenility!

Tom Chetsom, careless *bon vivant* as he seems, and is, conceals beneath that rubicund jollity, an astute selfishness, and a real knowledge of life and human nature, to which his elder brother makes great pretension. But that which the elder *seems* to be, without being it, the younger *is*, without seeming it, as Browning would say.

Well, these are the patrons selected for our Walton Sappho. They are to launch her into the "great world." Sir Chetsom has permitted the dedication of *Glooms and Gleams* to himself. He is to introduce the volume into the "first circles," while Tom Chetsom is to bruit its fame in all the clubs.

I have not yet seen the poetess herself; but propose to fall in with the general "rage," and pay a visit at the Grange some day when she is there. I will give you a full description.

And there is an end of my budget.

CHAPTER II.

THE WOMAN WITH A MISSION.

Ein starker Geist in einem zarten Leib
Ein Zwitter zwischen Mann und Weib,
Gleich ungeschickt zum Herrschen und zum Lieben,
Ein Kind mit eines Riesen Waffen
Ein Mittelding von Weisen und von Affen!
SCHILLER.—*Die Berühmte Frau.*

MARMADUKE and Violet, "so justly formed to meet by nature," have not, it may be supposed, remained insensible to each other's charms. The elopement of Blanche gave him several opportunities of making eloquent remarks on the superiority of affection—the riches of the heart—to mere worldly wealth; and to utter several stinging sarcasms on those who gave up the worship of a loving heart, for the trumpery advantages of an establishmeut and a position.

These sarcasms were, of course, meant for Mrs. Meredith Vyner, who accepted them in bland silence, or made vague defenses, saying that women were often misjudged, because the *whole* of the facts were not known.

Violet so entirely responded to his sentiments, and, without knowing the previous connection between him and her mother, so unhesitatingly applied those sarcasms to her, that she became more and more attracted to him, from the fact that they alone seemed rightly to have read her mother's character.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner saw, with strangely mingled jealousy and pleasure, the growing attachment of these two. She did not love Marmaduke: she had never loved him, in any high or generous sense of the term. But he had filled her girlish imagination, and he still exercised a certain fascination over her. She admired his beauty; she delighted in the sense of power exercised over so fiery and impetuous a creature; it was exquisite flattery. To see her place occupied in his heart, was, therefore, singularly irritating. His anger was an avowal of his love. His threats of vengeance, much as she might dread them, were the threats of one who suffered in his love. And so clearly did she perceive this, that it occasioned no surprise to observe how, in the same measure as his attachment grew to Violet, his anger seemed to abate, his mind no longer to run upon its old topics of inconstancy and vengeance. No surprise, but great jealousy!

Other feelings mingled with this. She could not but be delighted to think that Marmaduke had ceased to harbor any schemes against her peace: the tiger was pacified, or attracted by other prey. This was not all. She hated Violet, and watched the development of this passion with curious eagerness, because in it she foresaw two sources of misery to her daughter. If they married, she thought they would be mutually wretched, and it was in her power at any time to make Violet horribly jealous, by informing her of Marmaduke's early attachment. That was one source; another was, with a little coquetry and cunning on her part, to bring him once more at her feet, which, she doubted not, she could still effect.

Under the "still-life" of what seemed the most uneventful of country residences, under the smooth current of every-day occupations, such were the tempests rumbling in the deeps, and ready at an instant to burst forth! The drama was really there; it *seemed* to be elsewhere. The development and collision of passions, out of which the dramas of life are constructed, were circumscribed within the walls of the Hall and the Grange. But it was elsewhere that the noisy bustle of event—noisy because of its emptiness—attracted the attention of spectators, and seemed, by the talk occasioned, to have absorbed all the interest which could possibly lie in the elements afforded by the neighborhood

But, first, a word respecting one of the principal actors. I mean Hester Mason, the poetess. Had Rose's letter, in which, according to promise, she doubtless gave a detailed description of the Walton Sappho, fallen into my hands, you should have been treated with her lively account of this important personage; her womanly acuteness and observation would have assuredly delighted you. As it is, my matter-of-fact pen must be the substitute.

Hester Mason was five-and-twenty, and still wrote Miss before her name; not because adorers were backward, but because they were Waltonians. They had no "spirituality;" they had no "imaginings;" they had no "mission." Life to them had no "earnestness;" they lived without a "purpose." Cowards, they humbled themselves before "conventionalities," and dared not tell society to its face that it was a lie. They went to church; they called themselves Christians, because they followed an antiquated routine, and did not comprehend the later "developments" of Christianity necessitated by the "wants of the age." Above all, they shuddered at the true doctrine of social regeneration, that, namely, of the emancipation of woman, and thought that marriage should be indissoluble. They were humdrums!

Not to one of those could she descend; her soul was too lofty, her passions too "devouring," to waste themselves on such "clods." Indeed, had she been less of a "priestess," she might have been equally exclusive; since the Waltonians were utterly without taste for literature, philosophy, or art; and were as ill-looking as the inhabitants of small towns usually are. Hester had been thrice on a visit of a few days to London; she had seen Hyde Park and its brilliant company; she had walked down St. James's-street and Pall Mall, and on the doorsteps of the clubs had seen men who were gods compared with the dandies of Walton. She had feasted upon contemporary literature, and had written burning letters of wild enthusiasm to Bulwer, in imitation of his "Florence Lascelles." She had dreamed ambitious dreams, in which she held a scepter in London society, and awoke to find herself in Walton!

Hester was handsome, but coarse-featured. Her black hair and eyes gave a certain eclat to a face ornamented with a nose which irredeemably betrayed her low birth, and surmounted by a forehead too high and large for beauty. She was about the middle height, and had a magnificent bust. Her hands were large and coarse; her legs were—to express them in one word, I should say they were *Devonshire legs!* In her dress, gait, and manner you saw something which, though not positively vulgar, was distinctly not ladylike; a certain *brusquerie*, almost pertness, and a dogmatism, which is at all times shocking in a woman.

About the time when Julius St. John first interested himself in the publication of her volume of poems, Hester, worn out with awaiting her "ideal," and almost despairing of ever reigning in London society, began so far to humble herself in her own eyes, as to admit the attentions of the surgeon's apprentice, newly arrived at Walton. True it is that James Stone, the aforesaid apprentice, had a dash of London about him. He was not a Waltonian, he was not a humdrum; so far from it, that he had the character of a "rake!" He discoursed about the ballet; had been behind the scenes at the theaters; was well-versed in Jullien's promenade concerts (then a novelty); smoked a meerschaum; and when in full-dress turned his shirt-sleeve cuffs over his coat, much to the amazement of the Waltonians, who imagined he had just washed his hands, and had forgotten to turn back his cuffs, so little did they appreciate the dandyism!

It may appear strange, but that little trait of elegance won more of Hester's admiration than all his personal charms, and they were not few, could have effected in a month. It gave him a London air. It made him so superior to the provincial bumpkins, who laughed with coarse ridicule at an elegance they could not understand. It was in vain Hester, bridling, told them that the "pink of fashion and the mould of form"—the all-accomplished Count D'Orsay—wore his cuffs in that way. They only laughed the more, and christened Stone—the Walton *De* Orsay.

As long as Stone held out against the ridicule which his innovation excited, Hester accorded him her sympathy, and almost her love. But when he yielded to public opinion, and turned back his cuffs to their original place, she suddenly cooled toward him. It was a submission to conventionalities. It was a truckling to society. It was cowardice.

He purchased his pardon, however, and by a speech so adroit, that in Walton it must have appeared worthy at least of a Lauzun—had Lauzun's name ever been heard there.

"If I do not yield this trifle to public opinion, they will force me to quit this place, and to quit the place would be quitting *you*."—She forgave him.

But her pardon availed him little. Invited by Mrs. St. John to the Grange, patronized by the "great people" round Walton, her volume on the eve of being launched into the wide sea of literature, she felt all her old ambition revive within her, and scarcely forgave herself for having idled away an hour with such a youth as Stone—too poor for a husband, too insignificant for a lover.

The patronage of Sir Chetsom Chetsom completed her intoxication. That graceless old Lovelace, struck with the beauty of his protégé, saw at once the facilities afforded him for an intrigue. He was constantly at her father's. Her poems made the pretext of his visits. Her charms formed the staple of his conversation, varied by accounts of London society, and visions of the brilliant career which awaited her, if she only determined boldly to enter it.

A sorry figure, truly, was the wigged and whiskered baronet for a girl with "bright imaginings," and at five-and-twenty, to choose as her lover; and yet, if I have contrived to indicate her character properly, the reader will not be surprised at her lending a willing ear to the old boy's artful flatteries.

He was not young, but he was rich. He had no "imaginings," but he could tell of the splendors of the capital. He had no "mission," but he wore *bottes vernies*. He was without "earnestness," but he talked fluently of all the

new works, and had met most of the literary lions in society.

More than all, he was Sir Chetsom Chetsom, and she was Hester Mason, the linen-draper's daughter. Rank gives a luster which dazzles even virtue; and Hester had very few scruples of virtue to struggle against; so that ambition found her an easy victim. She coquetted—she was "cruel" to her adorer; not because she was afraid to yield, but because she wished to sell her honor dearly.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT WAS SAID OF THE WALTON SAPPHO.

"Is it not shocking?" said Mrs. Ruddles, the curate's wife, to Mrs. Spedley, the surgeon's better half, as she sipped the smoking bohea, and commented on the ongoings of Walton, and its "muse" in particular—"Is it not shocking to witness such depravity? To think of his taking up with such trumpery as Hester Mason!"

"And to think of her encouraging the wicked old villain!" ejaculated the indignant Mrs. Spedley.

"And her father to shut his eyes!" suggested the post-mistress of Walton.

"What can she expect will be the end of it?"

"I'm sure, I can't say."

"He's married, too," said Stone, angrily; for Stone was now utterly neglected: he had even turned up his shirt cuffs, with D'Orsay magnificence, on the preceding Sunday; and still Hester had not vouchsafed him a look.

"Married! yes; but he could get nobody to live with him; and his wife has been separated many years," observed Mrs. Ruddles; "and no wonder!"

"So that Hester falls with her eyes open—she can't expect him to marry her—the minx!" said Mrs. Spedley.

"Oh, no. Besides, she looks upon marriage as immoral."

"Ah!"

"Yes, yes: very comfortable notions *those* are for some people."

"Very. *This* comes of writing poetry!" gravely and philosophically remarked the surgeon's wife.

Her husband entered at that moment.

"Pretty poetry it is!" he said. "Hang me, if I can make head or tail of it. Long words and inflated sentiments—nothing else!"

"Such trash!" scornfully added Mrs. Ruddles.

"So frivolous!" chimed in Mrs. Spedley.

"As if there was any thing in that, to cock up one's head about," pursued Mrs. Ruddles.

"And to fancy herself so superior to every one else."

"Well, give me good, common sense in a woman," fervently ejaculated Spedley.

"And me."

"And me."

"Oh, and me."

"It was but last night," said Spedley, "that she took upon herself to set me right about the vote by ballot; and, instead of arguing the point, she told me I was incapable of forming an opinion on it, ignorant as I was of the *rapid developments of humanity*. To be sure, I was—how should I know what she meant by that?"

"He—he—he!" tittered Mrs. Spedley.—"Developments of humanity, indeed!"

"That is a philosophy *she* understands," said Stone, sarcastically; "and will certainly give us an *illustration* of it *herself* shortly."

Stone chuckled immensely at this *double entendre*; and the ladies, forgetting their prudery in their spite, laughed too, and declared that nothing was more likely.

That is only a sample of what was said in Walton. The whole town was busy with the event. Envy aided tittle-tattle; and not a voice was raised in Hester's defense. Sir Chetsom to visit her! Sir Chetsom to drive up to her door! Sir Chetsom to send her game! Sir Chetsom to take her drives in his curricle. It was enough to make an English community, like that of Walton, mad. How she escaped lapidation is a mystery.

Hester knew the scandal she occasioned, and triumphed in it. To be the mark for jealousy, was a condition affixed to superiority. Detraction was the tribute impotence paid to power. She was hated—she knew it—how could it be otherwise?—was she not a genius? At their gossips she laughed; with society and its *sophisms* she was at open war.

Having had this one glimpse of the state of opinion in Walton, let us now turn our attention to the Hall. The St. Johns, Marmaduke, Tom Wincot, and the family, are in the drawing-room. Julius holds the volume of Hester's poems in his hands, having just finished reading it aloud.

"Now, Mr. Vyner," said Julius, "do you rescind your harsh judgment? will you not admit that there is at least great facility in these poems?"

"Facility?" replied Vyner. "Yes, yes,

> Nempe incomposito dixi pede currere versus.

I find too much of it: fatal facility, betraying the want of that *labor limæ*, without which no work can have value."

"She will learn the difficult 'art to blot' in time," suggested Julius; "at present she is all exuberance."

"Is not over-luxuriance," said Violet, "rather the property of weeds than of flowers?"

"Certainly," said Vyner. "The volume wants weeding sadly. You know what 'Horace' says?—

> Ut brevitate opus, ut currat sententia, neu se
> Impediat verbis lassas onerantibus aures."

"Well," interrupted Rose; "but not to be so critical, do you not think the volume shows great power?"

"Rather the *will* to be great than the *power*," said Marmaduke. "It is daring and extravagant, but it does not seem to me to have the daring and extravagance of genius."

"Doesn't it stwike you as vewy stwange that a young woman should wite in such twemendous misewy? Nothing but seductions, delusions, bwoken hearts, pwostwated spiwits, agonies of wemorse, tewible pwedictions, wetched wevewies, and all that sort of thing! Besides, what does she pwopose when she

wepeatedly weitewates the necessity of some better and more weflective Chwistianity?"

"Those are the extravagances I speak of."

"I confess," said Violet, "I do not like the tricks she plays with language: surely all those uncouth compounds, and those obtrusive vowels which every body else consents to drop, are useless affectations?"

"Those are the conquests of the New School," said Marmaduke.

"I thought that our great poets had found the language harmonious and flexible enough."

"You see, Mr. St. John," said Rose, laughing, "they are determined to pull your poetess to pieces. Don't hear any more. I will admire her with you, and we shall form the fit audience, though few."

The conversation did not cease here; but we have heard enough. Let us hurry, therefore, to Belgravia, where resides Sir Chetsom Chetsom, who has been forced to run up to town for a few days, and is now seated opposite his brother, his hand upon the claret decanter, listening to a brotherly remonstrance.

"I tell you, Chet, she is *une intriguante:* underneath all that romance and extravagance, I see a very cool calculation. In the letter you have just read me, I divine her character."

"What is there in that to make you suspicious?"

"Oh! no single passage, but the whole tone. Do but consider for a moment. Here are you, a married man, writing love-letters to an unmarried girl; she does not repulse you—she does not even *pretend* to be offended—she says nothing about your wife, nothing about the unmistakable nature of your intentions."

"But I tell you, Tom, the giarl is decidedly fond of me."

"Humph!"

"You doubt it?"

"Considerably."

"Very well, very well. I, who see her, who watch her, and who, I flatter myself, know *something* of women—*I* think so, and that is enough."

"Do you ever look in the glass, Chet?"

"Often."

"And the result is?"

"Very different from what must occur in your case, Tom, if ever you venture on such a piece of temerity."

"And you think yourself still capable of inspiring a passion?"

"The thing is done."

"And *you* are done, Chet," said Tom Chetsom, placing one bulbous finger at the side of his vinous nose, and closing one oystery eye, by way of pantomimic comment on his words.

"You don't know women, Tom."

"Well, let us grant for a moment that you have made an impression; don't you see the imprudence of having an intrigue so near your home, in a little place where every action is noticed and discussed?"

"I don't care a fig what they discuss. That's the giarl's look out, not mine, damme! If neither she nor her father object to my visits, why should I be squeamish?"

"Why? Because you will be the laughter of the county."

"Thank ye, Tom!"

"I'm serious, Chet. Your age is tolerably well known *there*, and you may imagine the gossip and the ridicule which will attach to any affair of yours with a young girl. It will be the talk of the whole county."

Sir Chetsom knew that quite as well as his knowing brother; but what his brother did not know was, that the great attraction in this intrigue consisted in the very fact so distinctly enunciated—"It will be the talk of the whole county!" He wished it to be so. He anticipated the scandal, and rejoiced thereat. He heard the chorus of virtuous matrons declaiming against his "wickedness," and the sound was exquisitely flattering. He shook his head with an air of knowing satisfaction as he read (in his mind's eye) the paragraphs in the local papers upbraiding him for his villainy. The phrase—"The wretch! at *his* age to be seducing women!" flattered his anticipative ear more sweetly than any strain from Beethoven or Mozart could lull the spirit of a musician.

Tom Chetsom, frank old fellow, never once attempting to conceal a wrinkle, or to disguise a bald patch, could not comprehend his brother's secret pride in being made a butt. He understood the vanity of his brother's dandyism and juvenility; he saw specimens enough of that at his club. But knowing how all men, and above all men Sir Chetsom, shrunk from ridicule, it was a puzzle to him that the inevitable ridicule of his intrigue with Hester should not be a bugbear to frighten him away He forgot that amidst all the ridicule and reprobation, there would be a tacit acknowledgment of Sir Chetsom's lady-killing powers; and for that acknowledgment he could scarcely pay too dearly.

As a a mere safeguard for his vanity, and not out of any illiberality, he had from the first determined upon making no settlement on Hester, in case she should consent to live with him. If his intrigue cost him any thing, the laugh would justly be turned against him as a dupe. If it cost him nothing, the world would storm at his meanness, but they would believe in his power.

CHAPTER IV.

PROPHECIES FULFILLED.

"What makes you so serious to-day, Mrs. St. John?" said Violet, about a week afterward.

"I am getting anxious about my protégé. It was my Julius who introduced her to the notice of Sir Chetsom Chetsom; and I fear no good will come of it."

"Are you, then, of the Walton party?" asked Violet. "And do you lend an ear to all the scandal of that miserable place? Consider Sir Chetsom's age."

"Yes," said Rose; "but consider also his pretensions. We know Sir Chetsom is old; but he wants to be thought young."

"I assure you," said Mrs. St. John, "it makes me very uneasy. Julius has already taken the liberty of speaking to him on the subject, as strongly as he could; but Sir Chetsom only laughed at what he called his virtuous scruples. My only hope is, that Hester looks

upon their difference of age and station as a sufficient warrant for an intimacy which she would not otherwise allow. And yet I fear it is not so. I hope I may wrong her. I do not wish to think uncharitably; but from what I have observed of late, I think she is ambitious and unscrupulous.

"We must remember," said Violet, "that her very opinions on the emancipation of woman would lead her to adopt a freedom of manner, which, though it might be very innocent, would be so unlike the conduct of well-educated girls, that we, judging her by the ordinary rules, should be guilty of great injustice."

Mrs. St. John shook her head.

"Mrs. St. John demurs," said Rose.

"I do, indeed. I look with suspicion on those opinions. When I see a woman disdaining the ordinary notions of society, I expect to see her follow out her own opinions, and disdain the ordinary practices of society."

Meredith Vyner joined them.

"We are discussing the old subject—Hester Mason," said Mrs. St. John.

"And giving her all the virtues under the sun, poetry included," said Vyner. "Well, you have chosen a good subject. "We don't often meet with such a paragon. Where, indeed, in this prosaic place, should we look for such another

Cui Pudor, et Justitiæ soror,
Incorrupta Fides, nudaque Veritas,
Quando ullum inveniet parem?"

"By the irony of your tone," said Mrs. St. John, "I suspect you have heard something new about her."

"No, nothing new; at least nothing unexpected."

"What is it? Pray, let us hear it."

"The most natural thing in the world; she last night went off with Sir Chetsom Chetsom. *Interdum delirumus senes*, as Plautus saith."

This information was received in silence. Mrs. St. John colored deeply, and then turned pale. She was greatly hurt, because she considered herself in some measure the cause of this misfortune, by having first brought Hester into notice, and then having introduced her to Sir Chetsom.

It was too true. Hester had gone off; and Sir Chetsom had taken good care that it should not be a secret.

It would need a more graphic brush than mine to paint the tumult of scandalized virtue in Walton at this outrage upon public morals. To paint the swelling indignation of Mrs. Ruddles, the vehemence of offended purity in Mrs. Spedley, the uplifted hands and eyes of the mute but expressive post-mistress, the sarcasms of Stone, the brutal jests of Spedley, the moral declamation of the Rev. Richard Ruddles, the sneers, the epithets of abuse, the prophecies, of what "her end would be," the homilies on infidelity, poetry, and "new-fangled notions," and the constantly-reiterated but never-too-old reflections which each and all made upon their own sagacity in having "all along foreseen it."

The howl of Walton reached not Hester's ears; and if it had, it would only have sounded like the shouts of triumph in an ovation.

CHAPTER V.

THE ASTUTE MRS. VYNER.

L'epoux retint cette leçon par cœur.
Onc il ne fut une plus forte dupe
Que ce vieillard, bon homme au demeurant.
LAFONTAINE.—*Contes.*

On returning to the Hall, Meredith Vyner found a letter from Cecil. He retired into his study; for he was one of those who fancy that you can not possibly read any thing with attention elsewhere than in a study. Having deliberately adjusted his spectacles, and taken a liberal pinch, he began the perusal.

Its contents may easily be guessed. It was very penitent, very clever, contained two adroit quotations from "Horace," and a well-worked-up petition for pardon. Blanche signed it with him, and added a pretty little postscript of her own.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner having learned from Rose that a letter had arrived, the handwriting of which looked like Cecil's, hastened to join her husband, whom she found not only in his own study, but in what is usually termed a "brown study." He was sitting in an easy chair; his body slightly bent forward; the spectacles shifted from his nose to his forehead, one arm resting on the inner part of his thigh, the pendent hand grasping the opened letter, the other arm resting on the table, the hand caressing his snuff-box.

"So you have had a letter from your son-in-law?" she said, as she entered.

He handed it to her; she read it slowly. On looking into his face as she returned it to him, she saw that he had forgiven them.

"A very clever epistle," she said; "very clever. And of course you grant the pardon. They knew that very well; they were quite sure of that when they ran away, otherwise Cecil would not have been such a fool; but he knew your weakness—knew how easily you were to be managed, and was quite sure that *I* should never oppose him."

Meredith Vyner took a pinch, angrily.

"Shall we have them to live with us? I dare say that is what they expect—and, perhaps, it would be the best. Or do you intend making them an allowance?"

Meredith Vyner took three pinches, rapidly.

"Do you know, dear—I think, perhaps, it would be as well not to relent at once, because it will be such a precedent. Keep them waiting a little; they will be all the more grateful when it does come."

"And *who* said it was to come at all?" asked the indignant Vyner.

"I took that for granted."

"Yes, yes, of course, for granted. Every body seems to take things in my house *for granted*. *I'm* not to be considered. *My* wishes are not to be consulted. And yet I believe I am master here—I may be wrong—but I fancy this house is mine."

His wife smiled inwardly, as she added, "And your children's."

"How my children's?" he sharply asked. "It is none of theirs; it will not even be theirs at my death. Theirs, indeed!"

Mrs. Meredith Vyner knew perfectly well the effect to be produced by her apparently careless

phrases, and played upon her husband's mind with a certainty of touch highly creditable to her skill.

"'I am surprised, my dear Mary, to hear you talk so. For granted, indeed! No; it shall *not* be for granted; it shall not be at all. I *will* be master in my own house. I have already submitted too much to my daughters; and they shall find I will do so no more. A pretty thing, indeed, to brave her father, to bring a slur upon her name by running away with a penniless adventurer: a man I don't like; a mere superficial dabbler, who pretends to understand Horace, and is quite at sea with respect to the Horatian meters. He'll never do any thing; never be any thing. And yet he expects that he has only to write me a whining letter, and all will be forgotten. He doesn't think it possible I can refuse. No, no; takes my pardon for granted. But it is not granted. It shall not be."

"This will soon blow over, I'm not at all afraid for my dear Blanche. You will not be able to hold out long."

"There is your mistake."

"We shall see, we shall see," said she, with a tone of most expressive certainty of the truth of what she said, and left the room.

Meredith Vyner was seldom angry; but the provoking confidence of his wife, in what he chose to consider her opinion of his weakness, made him furious against the cause thereof—the offending Cecil.

From what impulses spring human actions! Here is a man delighted by the opportunity afforded him of forgiving his offending child, and ready to clasp her to his bosom. That is the natural instinct of his heart. His wife comes; and, by pretending to urge the very act he is about to perform, by choosing to assume it as a settled thing, and insinuating thereby, that from his known weakness, every body must also assume it, she stifles the parental feeling, awakens his miserable vanity, and makes him exhibit his weakness by the very action which he intends as a proof of his fortitude and decision.

Resolved to show how mistaken those were who fancied he was to be led by the nose, he sat down, and wrote this brief, and, as he thought, crushing reply:—

WYTTON HALL, 10*th Nov.*, 1840.

"SIR,—You have made an error in your calculations. I am not so easily bamboozled as you imagine. You are very clever, I have no doubt; but—

Vix illigatum te triformi
Pegasus expediet chimæræ.

And with this I close all correspondence between us. Yours truly,

"H. S. MEREDITH VYNER."

"That quotation is rather happy," he said to himself, as he folded the letter. Indeed, so pleased was he at its felicity, that it would now have cost him some pangs not to send the letter; he could not afford to lose such an effect.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner was very shortly after found sobbing in her room, by Rose. To the anxious inquiries of the affectionate girl, at first no other reply could be elicited than—

"Oh, my poor Blanche!—poor Blanche!" accompanied by fresh sobs.

After about five minutes of this irritating and inexplicit grief, Rose managed to ascertain that Blanche was not to be forgiven.

"Impossible!" she exclaimed. Oh, I will go this instant and intercede for her!"

"Do, my dear—do—lose no time! And, Rose, don't mention that you have seen me. Pretend to know nothing, except that Cecil has written; and ask your papa when we are to see them, just as if it were a matter of course that he would forgive them."

"I will."

She went. Her success may be imagined; Vyner stormed at her; said, she was just like her sister, and had been so long accustomed to regard him as a cipher, that she could not even suppose him capable of punishing such an act of wretched disobedience.

On going to bed that night, Meredith Vyner seemed to have become greatly pacified by the day's reflections.

"It is rather a good letter, that of Cecil's," he said. "Well expressed."

"Very," answered his wife. "Perhaps rather too well expressed for sincerity. But he's a clever fellow. I always liked him. He is so gay and rattling."

"Better qualities in a guest than a son-in-law!"

"Humph! That depends—"

"His first quotation from Horace, too, is very well chosen—pat and pointed. Not so good, though, as mine to him! Egad! that was a stinger. Still, his deserves praise."

"I rather suspect, dear, that he made Horace a go-between. He pretended to be very interested in the poet, in order that he might woo the editor's daughter."

"No, indeed, there you wrong him. He came to me at first purely out of love for Horace. He took great interest in my commentary—I must do myself the justice to say that it *is* a little out of the common—and he seemed to think so. He was never tired of it, till his head got stuffed full of foolish love nonsense. When he began hankering after Blanche, he left off reading my commentary. Still I can not deny that the great attraction first was the study of my notes and emendations."

She saw that he was getting on dangerous ground, and therefore threw out this lasso.

"Well, well, he knows your weak point, and by that he will gain the day. You won't long be able to disown a son-in-law who can quote Horace *apropos*. So that if your natural goodness doesn't make you relent, Horace will!"

"You think so; but you are greatly mistaken."

In this way she from time to time restored his faltering resolution. Whenever symptoms of relenting exhibited themselves, she contrived to banish them by irritating his vanity. Shakspeare, that great master of the human heart, has, in the third act of *Othello*, anticipated the scenes which are perpetually recurring between a cool, calculating scoundrel and his writhing, unsuspecting victim. With consummate art,

Iago always manages to keep before Othello's mind, the very idea he pretends to banish or to palliate; and directly he sees his victim relenting, as thoughts of tenderness for Desdemona arise, Iago contrives that the very tenderness shall add intensity to his sense of wrong. For instance, Othello says:—

I do not think but Desdemona's honest.

Whereupon Iago, with brutal-seeming frankness, says—

Long live she so! and long live you to think so!
Oth. And yet how nature erring from itself.
Iago. Ay, there's the point—as—to be bold with you—
Not to affect many proposed matches, &c.

With somewhat of the diabolical art Iago used, did the sylph-like humpback play upon her husband. And when she began to fear that, after all, she might lose the game, she adroitly changed her tactics and said—

"It has occurred to me that there is a way of settling this difficulty. Do not countenance Blanche's disobedience—do not see her husband—but we can from time to time assist them secretly. I can give them money, as if from my own funds. You will not appear in the matter at all, and yet you will have the satisfaction of knowing they are not in want."

This seemed so admirably calculated to save his dignity, and yet to preserve Blanche from the more serious consequences of his refusal, that he gladly adopted the suggestion.

Having gained this point, Mrs. Meredith Vyner sallied forth to pay some visits to her poor.

The devil is not so black as he is painted. Mrs. Vyner had her good qualities: and she was worshiped in her village. No one was so liberal to the poor; no one looked after the schools with greater or more judicious care; no one was more active in benevolence. She not only did kind things, she said them also; and that is an element in benevolence many charitable people omit. She attended upon the sick; she comforted the sorrowing; she listened to their long stories; she gave them advice; she interested herself in their joys and sorrows.

From what we know of her, we shall not be altogether dupes of this benevolence: we shall not suppose it pure, unmixed kindness. But it would, perhaps, be grossly wronging her to believe that it was hypocrisy, that it had not some real good feeling at the bottom. Although we may, and not uncharitably, suppose there was some selfishness and ostentation in this care for the poor, we may also believe that she felt some of the real glow of generosity and delight in doing good. In the ordinary sense of the word, she had no "interest" in her conduct.—She might have done her duty to the poor without going so far as she did. Their good opinion was of no "use" to her. Examine it how you will, you can discover none of the "interested motives usually supposed to influence the benevolence of selfish people.

Such a character is a paradox; but only a paradox, because we are so prone to regard human nature as very simple, and *all of a piece*, when, in truth, it is, as I have remarked before, marvelously complex. Mrs. Meredith Vyner was wicked, cruel, unloving, and selfish; it would be a contradiction in terms, to add that she was also kind, generous, and benevolent; but it is perfectly true that she would occasionally perform kind, generous and benevolent actions, perfectly disinterested. The secret I take to be this. Her cruelty was not wanton; it always had reference to some selfish object. But on occasions completely alien to her interest or her vanity, she could be kind; and, being an impulsive, imaginative woman, where she *was* kind, she was strikingly so, thereby turning it into a thing of *éclat*, and so gratifying her vanity.

It was said of himself, by Benjamin Constant, "*Je puis faire de bonnes et fortes actions; je ne puis avoir de bons procédés.*" This is a revelation of the profound depths of certain minds; and Mrs. Vyner belonged to that class. In a moment of enthusiasm she might even have forgotten her selfishness—or rather have staked all the gratification of her selfishness on the triumph of one moment; but she could not have completed her sacrifice; she could not have gone through with any line of conduct after it had lost its *éclat*; above all, she could not, in the ordinary transactions of life, have been generous, thoughtful, kind—she could not go through "the little nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love" which constitute real goodness.

Her conduct toward the poor seems to be thus explained: they did not stand in her light; nothing she could do, or omit to do for them, could influence her interests. But they were picturesque objects which struck her imagination, and appealed to her protection. A little trouble and a little money made her their benefactress. The pleasure of doing good was a pleasure she could appreciate, and it could be purchased for so little.

If any one supposes from the foregoing remarks, that I have what is called *explained away* her benevolence, he is mistaken. There are hundreds quite as selfish, who can not appreciate the pleasure of doing good; and she is so far their superior.

CHAPTER VI.

FAINT HEARTS AND FAIR LADIES.

On this old beech
For hours she sat; and evermore her eye
Was busy in the distance, shaping things
That made her heart beat quick.
WORDSWORTH.—*Excursion.*

AUTUMN was deepening fast. The green tints were rapidly disappearing, and the advancing year "breathed a browner horror o'er the woods." Wytton still looked lovely; the great variety of tints, from the dark brown of the copper beech to the delicate yellow of the cut-leaved hornbeam, made the grounds as splendid as a setting sun. The paths strewed with fallen leaves, spoke feelingly of the approaching change, when the huge trees would be stretching their melancholy branches out into the air, in gaunt loneliness.

Preparations were being made to quit Wytton for town, and both Marmaduke and Julius looked with regret upon the approaching separation. Town would never replace the country for them. They would see their idols there, it is true; but they would no longer see them in the

charming ease and *abandon* of Wytton Hall or the Grange.

The country is the place for a nascent love! It affords endless opportunities for *tête-à-têtes*, and the scenery gives a tone to the whole mind. London is very well for a flirtation, or when you can not have the country. But its riot and bustle, its endless dissipation of your time and distraction of your thoughts, would alone make it greatly inferior to the country. Shut up in a country-house, you have nothing to prevent an eternal brooding over your own thoughts; and those thoughts, can they be more sweetly employed than in hovering round the image of the beloved?

One bright, sunny, brisk, autumnal afternoon, six horses stood saddled at the door of the Hall. A ride to the sea-shore, about eight miles distant, had been determined on, Rose having expressed a desire for a good childish ramble on the sands, to pick up shells, and crack the seaweed pops.

Meredith Vyner, Mrs. St. John, Marmaduke and Violet, Julius and Rose, formed the party.

Mrs. Vyner staid at home. All the visitors had left the Hall, so that the present party was as large as could be mustered. They formed three pleasant couples.

"I think the young people behind understand each other," said Meredith Vyner to Mrs. St. John as they rode ahead.

"I wish they did," she replied.

"Do you then doubt it? I fancy Mr. Ashley's attentions are unmistakable, and Violet does not seem to look coldly on them. She is less haughty to him than to most people. Don't you think she's improved? Ah! I forgot, you did not know her then. She used to be a devil; such a temper! My poor little Mary, who, you know, is the timidest, mildest creature alive, used to be frightened out of her wits at her. She never dared to suggest any thing that was not perfectly agreeable, for Violet would burst out upon her—it was quite fearful! I never saw any of it myself. Violet was always well behaved enough before me. But I used constantly to find Mary in hysterics, or in tears; and although she always wished to spare Violet, and refused to specify what had been said and done, yet she could not conceal from me that my daughter's conduct was the cause of her emotion. However, thank God! sending her away from home seems to have tamed her. She is not very violent now, is she?"

"Violent! I think she is entirely charming. I know no girl possessing so much dignity and directness of mind. I quite love her."

"And what do you think of Mr. Ashley?"

"That he would make her an excellent husband. Julius, whose judgment is so good, has the highest opinion of him."

"And I," said Vyner—"not to flatter you—have the highest opinion of your son Julius. Upon my word, madam, you have a son to be proud of, as Horace says—

> Micat inter omnes
> *Julium*, sidus, velut inter ignes
> Luna minores.

A rare fellow; and one who, as a son-in-law—Do you think there is any thing there?"

"With Rose? I am puzzled. Julius is somewhat secret on such matters, and although he admires Rose, I do not feel certain how far his admiration goes."

"Well, you may tell him that he has not only my consent, but that nothing would please me more than to call him my son. Rose is a good girl; somewhat saucy in her wit, which does not even respect her mother at all times, but there is no malice in her. Mary, who doats upon all my children as if they were her own, says she can not wonder that such girls should exercise such empire over me; for you must know, Mary fancies I am led by the nose by my affection for the girls, and that they have the whip-hand, which is by no means the case. I may have indulged them, perhaps, too much when they were younger; but I flatter myself no one ever was able to lead me."

It may be supposed, that during this ride, neither Marmaduke and Violet, nor Julius and Rose were very silent; but their talk was made up of those delicious nothings to which time, place, and circumstance give significance, and tones and looks give eloquence: what George Sand finely calls *tous les riens immenses d'un amour naissant*. Haughty and impetuous as Violet was, she had great playfulness, and could unbend with bewitching ease. Marmaduke was also lively, and his animal spirits were stimulated by his desire to please. He was charming.

Chamfort—who has written some of the wittiest and profoundest aphorisms in the French language—has said—"Un homme amoureux est un homme qui veut être plus amiable qu'il ne peut, et voilà pourquoi presque tous les amoureux sont ridicules."

True enough: lovers do appear ridiculous to lookers-on; but that desire to please which prompts their words and actions, makes them lovable in the eyes of their mistresses. After all, the great secret of being pleasant is the wish to be so. It needs no grace of manner, no splendor of beauty or talent, to make all around you pleased at your approach. It only needs the honest wish to please.

Marmaduke was therefore charming in the eyes of Violet, although he said nothing during the whole of the ride, which could possibly be read with interest. His conversation was frivolous or common-place enough, but it had the particular seal of amiability.

So also Rose, the witty, sparkling Rose, laughed and made them laugh, without having uttered a single joke fit to be repeated; because if its wit happened to be undeniable, it would, nevertheless, ill bear transplanting.

This is the dilemma into which a novelist is forced if he chance to select a lively girl for a heroine: either he must consent to suppress the conversation, or else to give the impression of a vulgar, personal, flippant, disagreeable creature. In real life, vivacity gives point to a poor joke, and carries off the coarseness from a personal witticism. A laughing girl, with roguish eyes, and unmistakable hilarity of manner, may utter almost any thing—common-place or personality—not only with impunity, but with positive applause. But I am certain that if the conversation of lively young ladies were printed, it would be scouted as the coarse daubing of one who knew not what ladies were. Simply be-

cause a narrator can only give the words; he can not give tone and manner.

Be good enough to understand, therefore, that Rose was provokingly witty, though I can not repeat what she said. Take my word for it. Repose upon the "easier-to-be-imagined-than-described" belief. Represent to yourself a young and lively girl during a delightful canter, with her lover by her side, whom she likes to tease, and then "imagine" what conversation must have passed: there *can* be no difficulty about the wit, as you have to draw from your own stores.

A happy day they passed. The ride to the sea-shore was through pleasant lanes, strewed with fallen leaves; and the sea-shore itself presented a magnificent view. The tide was very low, and the distant sands and sea had the appearance of the early dawn of a summer's day. The sails of a fishing-smack or two dotted the horizon. A fresh, salt sea-weed fragrance saluted their nostrils; the *scrunch* (beautiful word!) of small shells and pebbles followed their footsteps; small stranded crabs, with incoherent efforts, were hurrying here and there; huge entangled masses of weed offered their pups to Rose's delicate fingers; and a basketful of beautiful shells was soon the result of their search.

In this extremely primative occupation, the time fled on. Meredith Vyner had wandered a long way down the shore, talking to Mrs. St. John respecting the virtues and accomplishments of his wife, and the manner in which his girls repaid her affection; which was followed up by a circumstantial history of his commentary on Horace: how the idea first came to him in reading a variorum edition: how the more he learned to know the commentators, the more he had learned to despise them, and to feel that a new edition was imperatively called for: how he had worked for years at this edition, and how, in short, he had finally got together the materials from which his monument would be built.

The tide was fast returning, and a rolling sea poured its restless waters, like the plunging of a powerful steed. Violet, seated on a rock, was contemplating it in silence; in silence Marmaduke dropped little pebbles into a tiny pool of water left in the rock. Both were sad, but with the sadness which is sweeter than joy. Both were silent, but with the silence which is more eloquent than speech. The breeze was playing with their hair, the music of "old ocean's roar" was sounding in their ears; the declining rays of an autumnal sun gave a poetic splendor to the scene, which was disturbed by no sound save the ceaseless wash of the advancing tide as it rolled upon the shingle.

It was one of those exquisite moments when the soul seems to tremble with delight at every thought which crosses it, when the susceptibility to external influences is so keen that the veriest trifles are robed in the splendor of imagination, and a scene which at other times would attract, perhaps, but little attention, has the enchantment of Armida's gardens. There are moments when the soul, with a vague but irresistible yearning, seems anxious to burst its earthly bonds, and to identify itself with the great spirit of beauty which hovers over the world—moments when the desire to love is so imperious, when the soul so eagerly seeks communion with some other soul, that the being, whom at other times we have perhaps regarded as indifferent, suddenly becomes the idol to whom a heart is offered as a sacrifice. The halo of mysterious feelings is around that being's head, and we mistake it for the luminous glory which encircles the Chosen. Just as the feeling of the moment sheds its luster over a common-place scene, will it make an idol out of a common-place person.

How many fatal mistakes in love are attributable to such illusions!

Marmaduke and Violet were both under the spell of such a feeling. Yet neither spoke; words were too imperfect to express what passed within them. He rolled his pebbles one after the other into the pool, with mechanical precision: she watched the broad advancing sea, and listened to its music.

Had he declared his passion at that moment, he would assuredly have been accepted; and the whole course of their lives would have been altered. But he paused; he "dallied with the faint surmise;" he played with his own heart, and waited for her to break the silence.

But she kept her eyes upon the advancing sea, and a sigh, a gentle sigh heaved her bosom, for by some accidental association the current of her thoughts had become changed: she ceased to think of Marmaduke, and was communing in spirit with her departed mother. Perhaps it was the dash of the waters on the shore which brought back to her recollection those days of her unhappy childhood, when, having lost her mother, she was wont to sit upon a rock, and hear the ocean speak to her wild words of comfort. There were voices in the waves then; and those voices faintly sounding through the past, spoke to her mysteriously now. The image of her dear, kind, much-loved mother, stood before her. A tear rolled over her cheek; and Marmaduke, whose attention had been attracted by her sigh, looked up and saw it. His heart was proud, for he thought that sigh and that tear were for him.

"What are you thinking of?" he tenderly asked.

She turned her full, large eyes, glistening with grief, upon him, and said, gently—

"My poor mother!"

And again her eyes were fixed upon the sea.

Marmaduke was hurt; and with a movement of impatience resumed his pebble-rolling. His self-love shrank, offended at this unexpected avowal, and he mentally reproached Violet with her coldness.

"She loves me not," he said. "Will she ever love me? Am I wasting my affections here as I wasted them before? Well, she shall see that I can be as cold and proud as herself."

In this frame of mind he remained seated by her side, making no attempt to withdraw her from the reverie in which she was indulging, and with the sullen bitterness of a lover, refusing to enter upon a conversation which would have dissipated all his doubts, and made him the happiest of men.

Julius and Rose having finished their collection of shells, and having immensely enjoyed

each other's society, though not a word of love had crossed their lips, came up to the rock and found the silent lovers not unwilling to prepare for the ride home. As they all four walked to the spot where the servants were with the horses, Marmaduke took Julius by the arm, and falling a few paces in the rear, said, hurriedly—

"Julius, laugh and joke as much as you please, but if the warning does not come too late, take care of your heart!"

"Explain, explain."

"Do not trust yourself—do not believe, that you can read a woman's heart from her behavior—do not make the mistake I have made."

He refused to be more explicit, but Julius fancied he comprehended his meaning. With a truly human *naïveté*, Marmaduke imagined that as *he* had been deceived, his friend would likewise be so; and in perfect sincerity he counseled Julius not to believe in Rose's manner, because Violet's manner, as he supposed, had been deceptive to him.

To another the advice would have been idle; to Julius it was agitating, and confirmed him in his natural backwardness to believe a woman could fancy him: a backwardness which Rose's manner had of late so far overcome, that he had been several times on the point of declaring himself, and would, I dare say, have done so during their ride home, had not Marmaduke's earnest warning held him back.

Violet, pensive and sad, rode home occupied with her own thoughts; Marmaduke, at her side, scarcely making an observation. Rose, as gay and fascinating as before, noticed a change in Julius, but said nothing to him about it, as she suspected love was at the bottom.

"I have finished my third reading of Leopardi's poems," she said presently, "and like them more and more. Their constant sadness is a great charm to me—I suppose, because having no sorrows of my own, I love to indulge in imaginary woes."

"Yes," he replied, "tears were given to man to purify him. So natural is sorrow to us, that if we have it not we invent it; the heart would dry up and wither, if it were not watered by the blessed fountain of pity. But Leopardi's sorrows were in excess, and became a mental disease. Smitten as he was in body, heart, and mind, by disease, slighted love, and skepticism, no wonder that his poems are melancholy."

"Was he then slighted in love?"

"He loved—loved twice—but each time the offering of his heart was rejected. What else could the poor hunchbacked, crippled poet, expect?"

"If he was a cripple, was he not a great poet? If his back was ill-shaped, was not his mind noble?"

"His *mind!*" replied Julius with a tinge of bitterness.

"Yes," she said, "his mind: could not a woman appreciate that?"

"Women can appreciate a mind, but they can not love it. Love springs from sympathy, not from intelligence: its seat is in the heart, not in the reason. A woman might therefore have admired Leopardi; but she could not love the cripple."

"Yet, did not Mademoiselle d'Aubigny marry the cripple Scarron?"

"To become Madame de Maintenon," replied Julius.

"I would cite a dozen other instances. Do you know, Mr. St. John, you are very ungallant in your opinion of our sex—which sex you can know very little about, to judge from your exaggerated notion of our regard for beauty. We like to keep the beauty to ourselves. As for me, I would as soon marry a hunchback as a guardsman, as far as the mere beauty is concerned."

A strange joy filled his heart as she said this, and he was about to declare himself, when Meredith Vyner called to him to ride forward and admire a little valley which lay to their left. Rose fell back and joined her sister. The rest of the ride was performed in threes, instead of in couples. As they reached home, Vyner made his favorite quotation:—

> Heu! heu! quantus equis, quantus adest viris
> Sudor!

and conducted Mrs. St. John into the drawing-room. Marmaduke, Violet, and Rose, followed them. Julius went into the study to write a note.

CHAPTER VII.

BOLD STROKE FOR A LOVER.

> Ah, cruel! tu m'as trop entendue!
> Je t'en ai dit assez pour te tirer d'erreur.
> Eh bien! connois donc Phèdre en toute sa fureur
> Je t'aime.
>
> RACINE.—*Phèdre.*

"Do you never sing, Mrs. Vyner!" asked Mrs. St. John, as she saw her beating time with her head (and curious time it was!) to Violet's singing.

"No; I have so little voice."

"That surprises me; I should have thought you must sing well, your speaking voice is so soft."

Mrs. Meredith Vyner smiled her acknowledgments, and redoubled the energy of her *impossible* time-beating. Marmaduke, charmed by the magic of Violet's singing, was gradually overcoming his anger, and was slowly admitting to himself what a divine creature she was.

She ceased, and Marmaduke prayed so earnestly for her to continue, that she again sat down, and while the rich contralto notes were making every chord in his heart vibrate, he suddenly encountered the savage gaze of his former "tiger-eyed" mistress. She rapidly closed and then opened her eyes, with that manner peculiar to her, and which I have mentioned before, and a smile dethroned the look of hate which the previous instant had usurped her face; but he marked the change, and smiled scornfully.

"What a beautiful voice she has!" said Mrs. St. John.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Vyner; "but we prefer Blanche's singing—she has so much *feeling*. Violet, you know, has more of the professional mechanism; but Blanche has a soul in her singing."

As Blanche was a rival out of the way, it

was safe to cry up her attractions, especially at the expense of one of the other girls. Violet was perfectly aware of what her mother meant, but she was not the less nettled. As she was about to commence another song, Mrs. Vyner said—

"There, my dear, that will do; you have displayed your accomplishments quite enough, and it is unnecessary for Mr. Ashley to listen to any more songs sung out of tune, however curious the ornaments may be."

Mrs. Vyner must have been very irritated, to have made a remark so plainly and directly disparaging and unkind!

"Did you notice that I sang out of tune, Mr. Ashley?" Violet quietly asked.

"Not at all. In fact, as far as I may be allowed an opinion, I should say your intonation is remarkably perfect."

"Well, I am glad you are not so severe a critic as mamma," replied Violet, with a calmness which was horribly exasperating, "because, as she can not distinguish one tune from another, her ears are so delicate that it is difficult to keep in tune to them."

This sarcasm, in answer to the petty, spiteful remark which called it forth, produced an uncomfortable silence, which Violet broke by beginning Paisiello's magnificent *Ho perduto il bel sembiante*, which she sang with triumphant energy and steadiness, showing how little the ignoble squabble had disturbed her.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner was pale with hate, but the twilight covered her paleness. In her rage at Violet's haughty sarcasm, and jealousy at seeing Marmaduke so enraptured with her, she resolved upon a diabolical resolve—she would regain Marmaduke's love, and break Violet's heart!

Meanwhile Julius was in the study writing this epistle—

"Dearest Rose,

"I can no longer restrain myself; I can no longer hesitate and live in doubt. I love you. You must know it; and what you said not an hour ago makes me bold. Do you remember your words—'As for me, I would as soon marry a hunchback as a guardsman, so far as beauty is concerned.' They were sincerely spoken, were they not? At any rate 'upon that hint I speak,' and conscious of my own unattractiveness, dare to hope my ugliness will not be a barrier to your affection. Do not ridicule my presumption, I entreat; look on it as an unhappy passion, which your own confession has urged me to declare. Even now I dare not tell you to your face I love you; partly because I still fear the avowal might distress you, and partly because the courage I shall need to bear with a refusal, would desert me.

"Examine your own heart calmly, and if it tells you that you could be happy with me—if it tells you that the devotion of my life would make up for all the superior attractions, mental and physical, in which I am deficient—then, as you come down to dinner to-day, bring in your hand the volume of Leopardi, and place it on the table. By that token, which can have no significance to others, I shall learn that I am not scorned. If your heart does not speak in my favor, the mere omission of this will tell me too plainly, but in the least cruel manner, that I have made a sad mistake."

This was folded up into a tiny note, and with it Julius marched into the drawing-room, to seek some means of delivering it. He found Rose playing with Shot, and stooping down to join her in that play, he easily contrived to slip it into her hand, just as the lamp was brought in. She blushed deeply, and her little bosom panted with hurrying feelings; but, making an effort, she ran out of the room, declaring it was time to dress for dinner.

She read the letter with intense eagerness, and finished it twice before she could make out distinctly any thing beyond the delightful fact that Julius had at last declared himself. On calming her agitation a little, and deliberately reading the letter once more, she felt a certain impatience at that passage which attributed the declaration to what she had said during their ride. For the first time, it then struck her that she had given him too broad a hint. Aware of his backwardness, and of his exaggerated notion of woman's desire for beauty, she was anxious to undeceive him on that point, and now saw that she had, perhaps; overstepped the bounds of maidenly reserve.

Now Rose, though a darling little girl, was not without her imperfections; and willfulness was among them. She would do and say strange things, because she *chose* to do and say them; but you were not to draw any absolute conclusions from them—you were not to hold her to her words unless she also chose to be held to them; she called that taking an advantage of her. In the present case she was very anxious to tell Julius that she loved him; she had gone so far as to tell him that his want of beauty would be no disqualification; yet when he availed himself of her words, and "spake upon that hint," she rebelled, and was impatient at such an advantage being taken of her "unguarded language."

Meanwhile, the dressing-bell had rung, and no one was in the drawing-room except Marmaduke and Mrs. Meredith Vyner, who were in the midst of a somewhat bitter and mutually reproachful conversation respecting the honesty and constancy of the two sexes.

"Men are so brutal," she said; "they always demand undying constancy from us—"

"And never get it—"

"And even when perhaps jealousy, anger, or despair have driven us into seeking elsewhere for relief from our outraged affections, they sneer and talk of our frivolity, and incapacity for an enduring passion."

"Well, well, it is easy to talk of jealousy driving a woman to extremity, but there must be shown some cause for that jealousy. Mere *absence*, mere inferiority in position, is *sometimes* enough to suggest ample cause for jealousy. An absent lover thinks incessantly of his mistress; a rich old lover makes his appearance; whereupon the engaged lady suddenly becomes jealous of her absent swain, and, *driven to desperation*, marries the rich old lover!"

Nothing could better please Mrs. Vyner than the turn taken by the conversation, which, in its generality of expression and covert signifi-

cance, best answered her purpose of justification, without seeming to justify herself.

"I agree with you. There must be ampler cause shown. But if the absent lover suddenly ceases to write, and reports arise that he is very assiduous in his attentions elsewhere; if to this silence, confirmed by these reports—if to the jealous rage which those who love ardently must feel when they are betrayed, he added the temptation of vengeance in the shape of a brilliant match, then, I think, we should not blame a woman's inconstancy, so much as we should pity her fate. Were she to marry a young and handsome man, she might be supposed to love him; but if, as in the case supposed by you, the new lover be old, then it is a proof that whatever wild motives may have prompted her wild act, inconstancy in her affections had nothing to do with it."

Marmaduke was a good deal shaken by this artful speech, but he rather felt than saw its falsehood. A shrug of the shoulders, and a slight incredulous laugh was all the answer he vouchsafed.

"There is this further difference," she pursued, "between the sexes. When a man has quareled with a woman—when he has deserted her or been deserted by her, he tramples down in his heart all former love, and replaces adoration with hate, or, at the least, with indifference."

"Very right, too."

"Yes, you men think so. But how differently a woman feels! Under the same circumstances, whatever may have been prompted by her rage or her despair, the act upon which she had resolved once performed, her love returns with all its former force—returns and lives in her heart throughout the rest of her life. This is what I mean by our superiority in constancy. When once we love, it is forever. No neglect, no ill-usage, no inconstancy can kill it. Weak and wayward, reckless and passionate as we are, we rush into wretched extremes—we do rash things when blinded by our tears; but, do what we will, we can not stifle the love that is in our hearts."

The little creature had risen and thrown back her golden locks with the graceful fury of a Pythoness: her eyes sparkled with an unwonted light, her nostrils were dilated, her whole frame seemed animated with passion, as she declaimed, rather than spoke, that vindication of herself in her sex.

I have said before that she had the nature of an actress. The present scene, therefore, was not only adapted to her histrionic display, but gave her such keen delight that she could have pursued it for a long while, quite independent of any ulterior purpose, had not Marmaduke suddenly arrested her eloquence, by asking, in a tone of subdued irony—

"And am I expected to believe all this?"

She paused to fix a passionate look at him. Then, slowly drawing from her bosom a small locket, held it up to him, and said scornfully—

"Do you recognize *this?*"

Before he had recovered from his astonishment, she had left the room.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "It is my hair!"

It was her father's.

CHAPTER VIII.

WOMAN'S CAPRICE.

Quelque raisnn qu'on trouve à l'amour qui nous dompte,
On trouve à l'avouer toujours un peu de honte.
On s'en defend d'abord; mais de l'air qu'on s'y prend
On fait connoitre assez que notre cœur se rend.

MOLIERE.—*Tartuffe.*

WE left Rose pondering over her lover's letter, and her own uneasiness at having, by her hints, called forth a delightful declaration. We return to her after the lapse of half an hour, and find her in the same state. At length the dinner bell rings

The volume of Leopardi lies on the table: will she take it down with her?

There is a fact in human nature which will be familiar to many, but which I am unable to explain, and that is, the occasional impulse which forces us to act diametrically opposite to our wishes. It is a sudden spasm of willfulness, wholly irrational, but wholly irresistible. I know that, in my own case, I have refused advantageous offers—declined invitations to pleasant excursions—entirely in obedience to this impulse of willfulness—which I have regretted the instant afterward, when either circumstances or my pride made the regret unavailing. No reason, no gratification of any vanity, indolence, or temper has been at the bottom of this. The impulse has been purely willful and irrational—motiveless, were not the motive enveloped in the very impulse.

I call attention to this fact, as a fact, because it helps me to explain Rose's sudden resolution not to take down the volume of Leopardi. Perhaps, in her case, there may have been some acknowledged influence derived from her annoyance at that passage in Julius's letter which threw the *onus* of the situation upon her. Perhaps she might have been secretly anxious to show him that she was not so ready to throw herself into his arms as he might suppose. I know not how it may be; all I know is, that with a sudden effort she walked down stairs, came into the drawing-room, saw the death-like paleness of her miserable lover, whose hopes had been thus scattered by a blow, seated herself upon a *vis-à-vis*, and joined in the conversation as if nothing had occurred.

It is easy to say that Julius was prepared for this—that his own diffidence had perpetually taught him to expect it; he had thought so, too, and yet he was *not* prepared. We sophisticate with ourselves quite as much as with others. We say we are prepared for an event which, if it occurs, takes us with the suddenness of a blow to a blind man. And Julius, when he saw Rose enter without the token, felt as if a grave had suddenly yawned at his feet. "Marmaduke was right!" he said, and instantly turned over the leaves of the "Book of Beauty," which was on the table.

Marmaduke, whom we left bewildered at the discovery of Mrs. Meredith Vyner's long-cherished affection, had not yet recovered from the agitation into which it had thrown him. The announcement that Mrs. Vyner was too unwell to descend to dinner, having been seized with one of her singular hysterical fits, added to the tumult of his thoughts; for he readily divined

the cause of that fit, and her wish also not again to meet him that evening.

It is needless to say how gratified he was. In his own eyes he had been rehabilitated. From the position of a jilted lover, he was raised to that of one loved, "not wisely, but too well;" and the keen delight it gave to his self-love, was something quite indescribable.

From a sort of instinctive feeling of delicacy, he kept away from Violet's side. Rose occupied him entirely.

Julius, was, therefore, enabled to hand Violet to dinner without any embarrassment. He was cold, grave, and dignified; speaking little, but that little without bitterness, without covert allusions. You only noticed that he was grave—not that he was hurt.

Rose was somewhat piqued. She knew that she had done wrong, was sorry that she had done it, but yet could not, without impatience, see the dignified reproof which there was in Julius's manner. Willing enough to repair by a word the error she had committed, she expected, indeed required, that he at least should show sufficient concern to induce her to repair it.

This is not very amiable, perhaps, but it is human nature. In a moment of capriciousness, she had rejected his proffered love; not that she meant to reject it, but simply because she chose to indulge her willfulness. She intended to release him from despair, as soon as her rejection had produced it; she had never thought of his leaving the house that evening, without a full assurance of her love. But now all her plans were overthrown. He exhibited no despair. His cold, grave manner was more like a stern reproof of her capriciousness, than the despair of a lover, Her rejection had been accepted; and she was angry with him for taking her at a word.

Violet was puzzled at the little attention Marmaduke paid her, and more puzzled at his eyes never meeting hers as they were wont, to mingle their luster with each other; and observing also the change in Julius, she began to speculate on the probable cause. Was Marmaduke suddenly smitten with Rose, and was Julius jealous of him?

It was a solemn, tedious dinner. Fortunately, Meredith Vyner had begun upon the inexhaustible subject of English etymologies, and talked enough not to observe the silence of the others. When the ladies withdrew, he entered into a discussion with Marmaduke, on the comparative merits of ancient and modern poetry, while Julius carefully cut some apple peel into minute slips.

They remained much longer than usual over their wine; and when they returned to the drawing-room, Julius missed the sweet, glad smile of welcome with which Rose greeted him, by studiously looking another way.

The change of feeling in a loving heart is very rapid from anger to sorrow, and Rose had long since lost all sense of pique, for one of sorrowful alarm. During the time the gentlemen had remained over their wine, she had reflected on the whole affair, and penitently avowed her folly. Her only course was to undo what she had done; and the smile with which she greeted him, was meant as the first intimation of her changed opinion.

But Julius neither saw that smile, nor afforded her the slightest opportunity of speaking to him; and—strange contradiction in human impulses!—the more he wrapped himself in his reserve, the more abject was her humility, in endeavoring to draw him out of it.

At length she fled to her own room, resolved to bring down the Leopardi, and hand it to him, saying—

"There is the book you ought to have had before dinner."

But when she reached her room, she was forced to vent her pent-up feelings in a flood of tears—and bitter-sweet those tears were: bitter, in remembrance of the past, sweet, in anticipation of the future. Having calmed herself by "a good cry," she had then to wash her face and eyes, to remove all traces of her grief. This took some little time.

When perfectly satisfied with her appearance, she took up the volume, kissed it fervently, and tripped down stairs. She found Violet alone, leaning her magnificent arm upon the table, in an attitude of profound meditation.

"Where—where are—they?" Rose faltered out.

"The St. Johns? Gone this quarter of an hour."

"Gone!" exclaimed Rose, in an agonized voice, and sank into a chair, with a terrible presentiment of some tragic results from her absurd caprice.

CHAPTER IX.

CONSEQUENCES.

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean—
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.
TENNYSON.—*The Princess.*

A RESTLESS, agitated night it was for the four lovers. Julius sat up packing. He had informed his mother of his rejection; and she, doating as she did on her son, was highly indignant at Rose's "unfeeling coquetry, which she never could have believed her guilty of." Espousing his cause with a vehemence that somewhat hurt him, she readily agreed to his proposal of their both leaving the Grange forthwith, and spending the winter in Italy.

Marmaduke also packed up that night. He had quarreled with Julius, and was determined to quit the Grange early in the morning. The subject of their quarrel had been the two girls, whom Marmaduke accused of being heartless coquettes, which Julius angrily denied. High words passed; for both were in a state of extraordinary agitation, from the events of the night.

Having completed his arrangements, he threw himself upon his bed, but not to sleep. Strange visions came to him—phantasmagoria, in which the image of the imperial Violet was ever and anon floating before the passionate figure of the sylph-like Mrs. Vyner, as she last appeared to him, proclaiming woman's undying love. Gradually his thoughts settled more and more upon

the latter. He began to consider the various parts of her story, and to compare it with the facts. Then a new light broke in upon him. It is one of the effects of oratory, that your ears are charmed, your mind borne away along the stream of eloquence or argument, without having time to pause and examine; but subsequent reflection often suffices to break the spell, and the enthusiastic applauder votes against the very sentiments he has applauded. So Marmaduke had been carried away by the skillfully constructed tale which Mrs. Vyner had improvised; and the plausibility of the non-receipt of letters, and reports of his attentions to another, had been so great as really to have made him doubt the justness of his old convictions. But, on reflection, that plausibility vanished. He remembered that his letters had been received and acknowledged till within a short time of the announcement of her marriage. He also remembered that he had been so occupied with affairs as to have had no time even for ordinary society in Brazil; so that no innocent flirtation with any girl there could at that time, by any possibility, have given rise to the reports by which she pretended to have been made jealous.

It was evident, therefore, that she was deceiving him again. For some purpose or other, she was playing with him.

"I will get to the bottom of this mystery," he said. "One of two things it must be: either she really loves me, in spite of all—and, in that case, I will profit by it—or else she is again coquetting with me for some purpose, or out of mere love of coquetry; and, in that case, I will avenge the past. She is as cunning as the devil! To dupe her, I must feign the dupe."

He turned upon his pillow with a chuckle of triumph.

Mrs Meredith Vyner slept soundly that night. A smile was on her lips, as she sank asleep—a smile of gratulation at the success of her experiment on Marmaduke. She was sure that he was in her power.

Rose could only stay her grief by the recollection that to-morrow would explain away all that was now doubt and misgiving. She intended to call early at the Grange, and frankly tell Julius that she loved him. Nevertheless, in spite of this resolution, a dark presentiment overshadowed her soul, and drove away the thoughts of happiness. She wept abundantly; sometimes at her own folly, sometimes in anger at Julius, for having so brutally taken her at her word, as if a woman's negative was ever to be taken, when looks and words had so often affirmed what was then denied. He ought to have known she was only teasing him; that it was only a spurt of caprice. He must have known it. But he did not choose to see it. He wanted to make her unhappy! A fresh flood of tears closed this tirade. And so on, throughout the long and weary night.

Violet having heard from Rose the real state of the case, was relieved from jealousy, only to be plunged into fresh doubt. What could be the meaning of Marmaduke's conduct? They had not quarreled. She had said nothing to offend him; nor did he seem offended; and yet—

For the first time, Violet now became distinctly conscious that she loved Marmaduke. His fearlessness, manliness, and frankness had early captivated her—to say nothing of his handsome person. Increased intimacy had shown her, as she thought, a heart and mind every way worthy of her love. But a certain mistrust—perhaps a recollection of her inclination toward Cecil, perhaps a vague sense of imperfect sympathy with Marmaduke—had kept her more reserved than was her wont; and this reserve was attributed to haughtiness. The chance of losing him, however, awakened her to a conviction of what the loss would be.

Day dawned; and with the dawn Julius set out for London. Marmaduke followed, at about nine o'clock. At eleven, Rose and Violet called in the carriage at the Grange.

"Mrs. St. John is gone to Walton," said the butler.

"Is Mr. Julius at home?"

"Mr. Julius is gone to London."

"To London?"

"Yes, miss; he went early this morning."

Rose sank back in the carriage, too overcome to weep.

"Is Mr. Ashley within?" asked Violet.

"He's also gone to London, miss."

It was evident that they were both deserted by their lovers. They drove back in horrible silence.

After luncheon, they again called at the Grange—Mrs. St. John had gone out for the day. The next day they called—Mrs. St. John had gone to London.

It would be painful to dwell on the sufferings of these two girls. Wounded pride, wounded love, baffled hope, and wearing doubt were the vultures consuming their hearts.

The next morning's post relieved some of Violet's fears, by bringing her father a letter from Marmaduke, apologizing for not having called to take leave of a family from whom he had received so much kindness, and with whom he had spent such happy hours; but being forced, by his quarrel with Julius to quit the house at the very earliest, he trusted the omission of a farewell visit would be excused; the more so, as the Vyners were themselves very shortly to come to London, when he hoped to do himself the pleasure of paying them his respects in person, and in person to thank them for their hospitable kindness.

This proved that he at least had not departed in anger. Mrs. Vyner secretly rejoiced at the event, attributing his flight to a sudden resolution to quit her dangerous presence, and attributing the letter to an uncontrollable desire to be with her again.

To Rose this brought no consolation. She had none, except that she must see or meet Mrs. St. John in London, and that she could then explain to her the whole affair.

How eagerly these three women longed to be in London, and with what feverish impatience they set out, when the day at length arrived.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

THE BOARDING-HOUSE.

Matthew. Now trust me you have an exceeding fine lodging here, very neat and private.

Bobadil. Ay, sir: sit down, I pray you. Master Matthew, in any case possess no gentleman of our acquaintance with notice of my lodging. Not that I need to care who know it, for the cabin is convenient; but in regard I would not be too popular and generally visited as some are.

BEN JONSON.—*Every Man in his Humor.*

RETURNED from their honeymoon, Blanche and Cecil began to look about them, and examine the state of their prospects. Her father had refused, as we have seen, to countenance the match; so that from him neither patronage nor money could be expected. Cecil called upon several of his influential friends, to see if any "gentlemanly situation" was open to his acceptance. I need not say how fruitless were those applications.

Yet "something must be done," he constantly observed. A wife was a responsibility which made him serious; and despairing of—for the present at least—obtaining any consulship or government office suitable to his pretensions, he determined to make a name in literature or art. That name would either be the means of enriching him as an admiring public enriches a favorite, or else would give him a greater "claim" on patrons.

Cecil was vain and ambitious, and from his boyhood upward had been desirous of creating for himself a reputation equal if not surpassing those whose names he heard sounded in every society. But, although he was very clever and unusually accomplished, he had as yet taken no serious steps toward that lofty object. He wanted that energetic will which must nerve every man who attempts to do great things, "to scorn delights and live laborious days." He was unequal to the perpetually-renewing sacrifice which lies at the bottom of all great achievements in art, literature, or science; the sacrifice, not of one temptation, not of one advantage, but of constant temptations. The artist is as one who, spending day after day in a luxuriant garden, must resist the temptation of culling the flowers that grow to his hand, of fruits that glisten before his eyes, and subduing the natural desire of man for instant fruition, consent to pass by these temptations, and, with spade and hoe, proceed to that work, which, after much steadfast labor, much watchful care, will in due season produce fruits and flowers equal to those around him. The delight of seeing his labor crowned with such results; of watching the nursling of his care thus growing up into matchless beauty, is a delight more rapturous than the enjoyment of all the other fruit could have given him. But, nevertheless, that delight is purchased by a sacrifice of present small enjoyments for future pleasures of a higher kind; and the sacrifice of the present to the future is that which ordinary men are perhaps least able to accomplish.

Cecil wanted the animal energy and resolution necessary for empire over himself. Much as he wished for reputation, he could not nerve himself to the labor of creating it. He was conscious of a certain power, and flattered himself that he could at any time succeed, whenever he chose to make an effort. But he could not make the effort. Parties of pleasure could not be refused; pleasant books could not be left unread; concerts and musical societies could not be declined. In short, one way and another, he "never found time" to devote himself to any work. There were so many "calls upon his time;" he had so many engagements; his days were so broken in upon.

Thus had he gone on idling and dreaming; coveting reputation, but shrinking from the means; dissipating his talent in album sketches, fancy portraits, album verses, and drawing-room ballads. His sketches were greatly admired; his verses were in request; his music was sung; and every body said, "How amazingly clever he is! What he *might* do, if he chose!"

But now poverty came as a stimulus to exertion. It was now a matter of necessity that he should work; and with cheerful confidence he sketched out the plan of his career.

His first step was to advertise in the *Times* for board and lodging on moderate terms, as their income was too small for an establishment of their own; and Blanche had never been initiated into the mysteries of housekeeping. To judge from the number of answers he received, one would imagine that a certain class of the English people were bitten with a singular mania—that of taking houses "too large for them," and the consequent desire "to part with the upper portion" to a genteel married couple or a quiet bachelor. Why will people thus shirk the truth? Why not say at once that they are poor, and want their rent and taxes paid?

Well, among these answers there was one which particularly struck Cecil. It was from a widow living at Notting Hill. Omnibuses passing the door every ten minutes; the quiet, unpretending comforts of a home; strictest attention to the respectability of the inmates, and sixty pounds a year for a married couple's board and lodging, were the inestimable advantages offered to the advertiser. The situation and the terms so well suited Cecil's present position, that he determined to look at the place.

The boarding houses of London are of every

possible description; from splendor to pinching, almost squalid poverty. That kept by Mrs. Tring was a type of its class, and merits a fuller description than I shall be able to give of it. The first aspect of it produced a chill upon Cecil. He had taken Blanche with him; and on arriving they were shown into the front parlor, with the information that Mrs. Tring would be "down directly."

It must be a beautiful room, indeed, which can be agreeable in such moments. I know few things more unsatisfactory than that of waiting for a stranger in a strange house. But the cold, cheerless, rigid, poverty-stricken appearance of Mrs. Tring's parlor, would at all times have made Cecil uncomfortable: how much more so now that he was contemplating living there! The drab who officiated as maid, with flaunting cap ribbons, slip-shod feet, and fiery hands—a synthesis of rags and dirt—came in to light the fire; a proceeding which only made the room colder and more uncomfortable than before, besides the addition of smoke.

The parlor had a desolate appearance. All the chairs were ranged in order against the wainscot, as if no one had sat in them for months. Not a book, not a bit of needle-work, not even a cat betrayed habitation. The settled gloom seemed to have driven away all animated beings from its prosaic solitude. The furniture was old, dingy, scrupulously clean, invalided, melancholy; it did not seem as if it had been worn to its present dinginess, but as if it had darkened under years of silence and neglect.

The Kidderminster carpet was of a plain, dark pattern, selected for its non-betrayal of stains and dirt; it was faded indeed, but in no-wise worn. The hearth-rug was rolled up before the fender. In the center of the room was a square table, covered with a dark green cloth on which some ancient ink spots told of days when it had been used. Six black horse-hair chairs with mahogany backs, and one footstool retiring into a corner—a portrait of a gentleman executed in a style of stern art, dark red curtains, and two large shells upon the mantelpiece, complete the inventory of this parlor, which in Mrs. Tring's establishment was set apart for the reception of visitors, and those who came to treat with her for board and lodging.

The want of comfort of this room did not arise from its appearance of poverty so much as from its cold, pinched look. It was a poverty which had no poetry in it—nothing picturesque, nor careless and hearty. Between it and the parlor of poor people in general, there was just the difference between a woman dressed in a silk dress which was dyed, then has faded, and is now worn with a bonnet which was once new, and a woman dressed in plain, common, but fresh, wholesome-looking gingham, which she wears with as much ease as if it were of the costliest material. It had the musty smell of an uninhabited room, and the melancholy aspect of a room that was uninhabitable. A sordid meanness was plainly marked upon it, together with an attempt at "appearances," which showed that it was as ostentatious as the means allowed. It was genteel and desolate.

Cecil looked at Blanche to see what impression it had made upon her; but the mild eyes of his beloved seemed to have noticed nothing but his presence, which was sufficient for her happiness. It suddenly occurred to him, that the more wretched the appearance of his home, the more likely would Vyner be to relent when he heard of it; and this thought dissipated his objections to the place.

Mrs. Tring shortly entered, with very evident marks of having just attired herself to receive them. Her presence was necessary to complete the picture; or, rather, the room formed a fitting frame for the portrait of the mistress.

Mrs. Tring was the widow of a curate, who, astounding and paradoxical as the fact may appear, had not left her with an indefinite number of destitute children. No: for the benefit of the Statistical Society, the fact shall be recorded. Mrs. Tring, though a curate's wife, had never borne a child; she had been left penniless but childless. When I say penniless, I use, of course, merely a well sounding word. The literal truth is, that although he left her no money, he had left her the means of earning a subsistence, by opening her house as one in which single ladies, single gentlemen, and married people could be lodged and boarded at a very moderate sum. The furniture was her own. Her boarders paid her rent, taxes, dress, and little expenses; and thus Mrs. Tring contrived to live, but not without a hard struggle! It was barely a subsistence, and even that was precarious.

Her personal appearance was not pleasantly prepossessing. She was horribly thin: with a yellow, withered face, which seemed to have been sharpened by constant struggles to gain farthings, and constant sorrows at disbursing pence. She wore a black net cap, and a black silk dress, white at the seams from age, the shape of which had outlived a thousand fashions, and taxed the most retentive memory to specify when it had been the mode. It was a low dress, and a piece of net, fastened by a large brooch, served to conceal her yellow shoulders.

In manner she was stiff, uneasy, and yet servile. She spoke with a sort of retention of her breath, and an intensity of mildness, as if she feared, that unless a strong restraint were exercised, she should burst forth into vehemence; she agreed, unreservedly, to every thing said, as if, had she ventured to contradict a word, it would have infallibly betrayed her temper.

To her visitors she displayed all her amiability, and acceded to every proposition with such good-humored alacrity, that terms were soon agreed upon. For the sum of sixty pounds per annum, payable monthly in advance, they were to have the back bed-room on the second floor, unfurnished, and their meals with the family: these meals to consist of a breakfast at nine, luncheon at one, dinner at five, and tea at eight.

"We live plainly," said Mrs. Tring, "but wholesomely; luxuries are, of course, out of the question, yet my inmates have always been satisfied."

"As I have not the slightest doubt we shall

be," replied Cecil; "I like simple food. What other inmates are there, pray?"

"The front bed-room on the second floor is occupied by an old gentleman who was in a government office, and is now living on his pension: a charming person, though a little deaf. The room next to his belongs to an Irish widow, a Mrs. Merryweather—I don't know whether you are acquainted with her, sir?"

Cecil smilingly replied, that he had not that honor.

"I thought you might be, sir; she has seen a great deal of society, and is a very lively lady. In the room above hers, we have a Miss Bachelor, a maiden lady—very gifted, sir. She teaches music in some of the best families. The third back is let to a Mr. Roberts, a young gentleman in the city, who only breakfasts with us."

Cecil bowed on receiving this information, which promised him that the fellow-boarders would, at least, afford some amusement to make up for the dreariness of the house. He announced his intention of taking up his abode there on the morrow. Accordingly, having moved what furniture he possessed, with some necessary additions, into the room he was now to call his own, and having hired in town a painting-room, which he fitted up for writing as well as painting, and moved his piano into it, he took his young bride to Mrs. Tring's house, and there they installed themselves, with some merriment at the shifts to which the want of space forced them.

It was late in the evening when they took possession, and they preferred not presenting themselves to their fellow boarders until the morning.

"This is a sorry home to bring you to, dearest," he said, as the servant, having lighted his candles, and asked if he had any orders to give, left the room.

Blanche twined her arms round his neck, and said tenderly to him: "Can that be a sorry home where love resides?"

"No, Blanche, no," he replied, kissing her forehead, "I was wrong. Love creates its own palaces; and we shall be as happy here as if we had a splendid seat. We are starting anew in the world—it is well to start from low ground, because the smallest ascent has then its proper value. Here will I build myself a name that shall make you an envied wife."

"I am already enviable—ought I to wish for more?"

What a delightful evening they spent, arranging their property in the most convenient places, and then sitting over the fire, discussing future plans, radiant in the far-off sunshine of Hope. That little room—what a world it was! In the corner stood their bed—in the center a round table—in another corner a small book-case—by the window a toilet table. Nothing could be more cozy, they said.

O, 'tis a paradise the heaven of earth;
Didst thou but know the comfort of two hearts
In one delicious harmony united,
As to joy one joy, and think both one thought,
Live both one life, and therein double life;
To see their souls meet at an interview
In their bright eyes, at parley in their lips,
Their language kisses.—CHAPMAN.—*All Fools.*

CHAPTER II.

INMATES OF A SUBURBAN BOARDING-HOUSE.

NEXT morning at breakfast Mrs. Tring's inmates assembled, and the new comers were duly introduced to their future companions. The breakfast was plain, and passed off rather uncomfortably, a feeling of restraint checking merriment. As the boarders descended, one by one, and were presented to Cecil and his wife, an unanimity in common-places formed the staple of remark, and every one seemed unwilling to unbend before having closely scrutinized the new comers. Small communications respecting the state of the health, and of the good or bad night's rest, were confidentially whispered in corners; while daring prophecies on the subject of the weather were more audibly pronounced.

Mr. Revell, the ex official, ate in solemn silence; Mrs. Merryweather, the lively Irish lady, was patronizing and polite; Miss Bachelor, as demure as a well fed cat; Mr. Roberts, a dapper clerk with a rosy face and well-oiled hair, was the only person apparently undaunted by the presence of strangers, and rattled on with more confidence than wit, until the half hour warned him of the approach of his omnibus, when he buttoned his single-breasted frock-coat up to the neck, passed on to his red fingers a close fitting pair of doe-skin gloves, rolled the silk of his umbrella into the smallest possible compass, and departed with the indelible conviction of being "about the neatest-dressed man to be met in a day's walk."

Breakfast did not last long. Mr. Revell then engaged himself in assiduous study of the second day's *Times*, the only vestige of a paper which found its way into that forlorn place. Mrs. Tring departed to look after her household concerns, leaving her boarders to their usual chat in the back parlor, until their bed-rooms were ready for their reception.

Mrs. Merryweather began to unbend, and Cecil feared that her liveliness might prove more tiresome than her reserve. She was a great talker of inconceivable small-talk; launched upon the endless sea of personal reminiscence, she told stories with all the minute detail of a professed *conteur*, excited attention by the ample paraphernalia of an anecdote, and baulked it by ending without a point. Of all bores, this species is the worst: it is the bore obtrusive and inevitable. Other bores can, with some adroitness, be managed, they do not enchain your attention; but the story-teller fastens upon your attention by artful preparations, and though you have been disappointed a hundred times, experience is of no use, for your interest is involuntarily accorded on every succeeding occasion.

To escape from the torrent of talk which was thus loosened upon him, Cecil sat down to the piano, and ran his fingers over the keys, after which he begged Miss Bachelor to favor the company with a taste of her quality. After the necessary hesitation and apologies, she sat down. From a teacher of music he anticipated a sort of railway rattle; but Miss Bachelor agreeably disappointed him by the modest execution of a sonata by Dussek; it was a mild, feeble, performance, unpretending as the

performer, and infinitely preferable to Mrs. Merryweather's stories. He then sang a duet with Blanche, then a solo, and then another duet. This concluded, he observed that Mrs. Merryweather had retired, and he followed her example.

"I can't say much for our society," he said to his wife, as they went out for a stroll.

"We shall not see much of it, you know. We have our own room," replied Blanche.

"True; but while I am at work?"

"I can think of you!"

There was no reply to this, but to press the arm that leaned on his, closer to his side, and to look fondly in her loving face.

During their walk they discussed their plans again with that inexhaustible interest which the future always has to the young and struggling; and they returned to dinner with a good appetite.

A significant smile was exchanged between Mrs. Merryweather and Miss Bachelor, and then between the ladies and Mr. Revel, as a handsome piece of ribs of beef was placed upon the table. Cecil noticed it, but failed to comprehend its meaning. He observed also that the hostess carved, and would by no means consent to his relieving her of the trouble; a procedure which the exiguity of the single slice placed upon each plate fully explained.

"May I trouble you for a little horse-radish?" he suddenly asked.

Mrs. Merryweather and Miss Bachelor—astonishment snatching up their eyebrows—simultaneously ceased eating. Mr. Revell, whose deafness prevented his astonishment, ate on. Ask for horse-radish! There was something bewildering in the very extravagance of the expectation.

In silence they awaited Mrs. Tring's reply.

"Horse-radish!" said that lady, with intense suavity. "Dear me! how very forgetful of me. But we never eat it ourselves; and it never occurred to me that you might like it. Very forgetful; very forgetful, indeed."

"Pray do not say a word about it. I care very little for it—only a matter of habit."

Emboldened by this audacity in the newcomer, Miss Bachelor ventured to think she could eat another cut of beef. Mrs. Tring, scowlingly, and in the most repressed tone, suggested the propriety of keeping a corner for the second course; to which Miss Bachelor assented, now fairly unable to conceive the immensity of the revolution which the appearance of the Chamberlaynes had created. A second course! Visions of pheasants—perhaps even grouse—darkened her bewildered brain.

Mr. Revell, as usual, had heard nothing, but sent up his plate for a second help; to all Mrs. Tring's shouts about "keeping a corner," imperturbably answering, "Yes, rather well done; and a bit of fat."

Mrs. Merryweather remembered how on one occasion she was dining at Colonel James's, who had married an old school-fellow of hers, the daughter of the man who for so many years kept the What's-the-name hotel in Jermyn-street, where the Polish count staid so many weeks, and was so like Thaddeus of Warsaw, only his name was Winsky, and he came from Cracow, and about whom there was that tragical story; how one night as he was walking down Regent-street, when he was suddenly felled by a blow on the head, and was taken senseless to his hotel. It was a most extraordinary occurrence, and excited a great deal of talk at the time; but Mrs. Merryweather could not at that instant remember the exact circumstances. But, however, that was neither here nor there. What she was going to say was, that her old school-fellow had married Colonel James—quite the gentleman—and often invited her to dinner; very good dinners they were too; plenty of wine and delicacies of the season—peas when they first came in, and all that sort of thing; well, one day—she never could forget it, live as long as she might—she had eaten so plentifully of the first course, a delicious saddle of mutton, that when the game arrived—she had not anticipated game—she was scarcely able to touch it; and Colonel James, with his usual affability, observed, "Ah, Mrs. Merryweather, you should have kept a corner for the second course."

This thrilling anecdote being ended, the beef was removed. Cecil was not a little amused when he saw that an apple pudding constituted this famous second course. But as, in the memory of man and boarder, no precedent for such an extravagance as pudding with hot meat had been known at Mrs. Tring's, the ladies were quite satisfied that such a second course should appear at all. The only misgiving in their minds was, whether such cheer was to become habitual; or was it simply an illusive and treacherous display for that occasion only?

A Dutch cheese followed the pudding, and there the dinner terminated.

Accustomed as Blanche and Cecil had been to the luxuries and refinements of their station, it may be supposed that this ignoble boarding-house was very repugnant to them, and that they suffered bitterly from the change. It was not so, however. Change is so pleasant to every human being, that, provided it be abrupt and striking enough to produce a vivid sense of contrast, it is eminently agreeable. The man who most enjoys a well-appointed table, whose pride it is to have his dinners served with the care and splendor bestowed upon banquets, will also enjoy "roughing it," and picking the leg of a fowl with no fork but his fingers—no plate but a hunch of bread. We like, from time to time, to feel ourselves superior to conveniences, superior to our wealth and its advantages.

The change was quite abrupt enough to make Cecil and his wife enjoy it; and on retiring to rest that night, they were as happy as affection could make them.

CHAPTER III.

HAPPY LABOR, HAPPY LIFE.

Si modo dignum aliquid elaborare et efficere velint, relinquenda conversitio amicorum et jucunditas urbis, deserenda cetera officia, utique ipsi dicunt, in nemora et lucos, id est, in solitudinem recedendum est.

TACITUS.—*De Oratoribus.*

THE splendors of the first day were never renewed. Exhausted munificence sank quietly back into ancient close-fistedness. Mrs. Tring

had given one banquet, but every day was not to be a holiday, as Mrs. Merryweather and Miss Bachelor mournfully confessed, when, on the succeeding morning, they found themselves returned to the salt butter, drenched tea, and implacable coffee, from which they had been one morning released. Still more dolorous was the aspect of the dinner. A return was made to the primitive allowance of one potato for each person, and the bread was as stale as before.

Cecil was of course chary of making complaints, but as he could not eat salt butter, quietly contented himself with dry toast: a proceeding which gained him the respect of Mrs. Tring, as it saved just so much butter. It was an ill-advised act, however, as it gave her the courage to make several other petty retrenchments—too petty for him to speak about—yet, nevertheless, annoying. He had not been there a fortnight before he determined on not staying beyond the three months for which he had taken his room. Having thus made up his mind that the annoyances were but temporary, he was enabled to bear them with tolerable stoicism.

Mrs. Tring had to make a living out of her boarders, and as she accepted such very low terms, the reader may imagine what nice calculations and minute economies were necessary. The house was, indeed, a field of battle, wherein, by adroit generalship, she every day gained a victory. The living was pitiable, and Cecil was forced, in self-defense, to keep a small provision in a store closet, from which he and his wife satisfied the appetite which Mrs. Tring's fare had stimulated, not appeased. It sometimes went so far as his sending out for a chop, which he cooked in his little room, over his dwarf fire. Nevertheless, with all the extra expenses into which scanty fare forced him, the place was remarkably convenient from its cheapness; and they both supported the little discomforts with happy light-heartedness.

Cecil was full of projects. He had begun a picture of considerable pretensions, the conception of which was not without grandeur: it was Nero playing while he gazed upon the blazing city of Rome. He had also sketched the libretto of a comic opera, of which he was to write both words and music. Gay and light-hearted as the hopeful and employed always are, the best qualities of his nature were brought out, and Blanche adored him, if possible, more than ever. Work—which was given to man that he might learn to know his excellence, and to know the pleasure which attends the full development of every faculty—work crowded the hours with significance, and gave to life a purpose; and love illumined with its sunshine the difficult path which stretched itself before him. Never—no, never—had Cecil known happiness till that time. He had squandered the riches of his nature as he had squandered the heritage of his parents; and now he came to know the value of what he had lost. A serious ambition occupied him, a happy affection blessed him.

Oh! who shall paint the luminous picture of their quiet life, which, to ordinary eyes, was so prosaic and insignificant! In that miserable house, where meanness hourly struggled with adversity, there was a small room, which was parlor, bed-room, and sometimes kitchen, all in one; and from the contemplation of which, when you were told that in it lived a pair who had been reared in luxury and refinement, you would have turned away with painful pity. Yet, were the secret history of that seemingly unfortunate pair known, your pity would change into envy, as those four miserable walls changed into a temple of Love, Youth, and Hope.

Poverty—a word of terror—is only terrible to the rich. The poor are not really the unhappy, for happiness is wholly independent of our worldly goods and chattels. If poverty has its hardships, wealth has its annoyances. If wealth can satisfy caprices, when satisfied they do not give the same delight as the cheap enjoyments from time to time indulged in by the poor. All things are precious in proportion to the difficulty of obtaining them, and the very facilities of wealth take from enjoyments their zest.

What makes poverty terrible is its proximity to want. And as want itself is often a thing of degree, the rich imagine that any deprivation of their accustomed indulgences must necessarily be a serious evil. But, in truth, the human mind is so constituted as to adapt itself to every condition, and to draw from its own health the requisites of happiness.

Blanche and Cecil were poor, but they had visions of future wealth and prosperity; meanwhile they had the glorious certainty of mutual affection, which irradiated their humble home, and made each hour of their lives worth more than all Peru could purchase.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW MRS. VYNER WAS BENEFICENT.

One morning while Cecil was in his studio, smoking a cigar and contemplating the sketch of his picture on the easel, with the air of a man who profoundly meditates on the details of a great conception, Blanche was in her room at Notting Hill, making the essence of coffee with a French machine, which they had purchased (unable to drink the incomprehensible mixture Mrs. Tring set before them), when a carriage drove up to the door. Blanche did not hear it, as her room was situated at the back. It was with great surprise, therefore, that she saw her mother and Rose rush into the room, and bound into her arms.

After the first hearty embraces and inquiries were over, Blanche became aware of the condition in which she was found, and blushed. It was not that she herself felt ashamed of her poverty, but she was hurt at the reflections which must necessarily arise in their minds respecting the folly of her marriage; so she hastened, in rather a precipitate and clumsy manner, to assure them how exquisitely happy she was.

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed Mrs. Meredith Vyner, "Then I have nothing to reproach myself with for not having interfered—for not putting a stop to Cecil's attentions—which I very early noticed, let me tell you. The only thing I now desire is to bring your papa round; but he is *so* obstinate! I do my utmost—but I almost begin to fear that my intercession only makes him more resolved; and I suspect if we were never to mention the

subject to him, he would relent very speedily. But depend upon me, my dear, for looking after your interests."

"Dearest mamma!" said Blanche, gratefully kissing her.

"As soon as I see him relenting, I will contrive to throw him in your way—and you can then manage him yourself—but do not attempt to see him till I give you the word."

"I will be guided by you."

Rose was unusually grave and silent.—Blanche noticed it, and noticed also that she looked ill.

"I have been unwell," Rose said; "but I am getting better now. A slight fever, that is all."

"And how is Marmaduke Ashley?" asked Blanche.

"Very well; we saw him yesterday; in fact we see him very often now," Mrs. Vyner answered; "somehow or other he has always some commission to execute for one of us, and, as he is an agreeable companion we make much of him."

"And how gets on the flirtation with Violet?"

"Why—pretty much as usual. I suspect it is only a flirtation just yet; or else he is kept at a respectful distance, for you know dear Violet is not the most affable of beauties."

"And Julius, Rose, how is he?"

"Indeed, I can not tell you," quietly answered Rose.

"You can't! What! do you mean to say, Rose, that—"

"He is in Italy, I believe," she said, interrupting her sister, but showing no more emotion on her face than if she were speaking of the most indifferent person.

Blanche was not deceived, however; she knew her sister's love for Julius, and divined a quarrel.

"That is the slight fever!" she mentally exclaimed; and then comparing her lot with that of her two sisters, felt it was infinitely preferable.

After a two hours' chat, they rose to depart. The real purpose of Mrs. Vyner's visit was to give Blanche fifty pounds, which her father had sent her, in accordance with the arranged plan that she was to suppose it came from her mother.

"And now, before I go, dear Blanche," said Mrs. Vyner, "I have to give you an earnest of your not being forgotten by me, however your father may act. Money from him, he vows, is out of the question; he will not give a sixpence. But out of my own privy purse, I shall from time to time take care of you. There, dear girl, take that;

The gift is sma', but love is a'.

I have set aside this fifty pounds—"

She was interrupted by Blanche throwing her arms round her neck, and hugging her tightly, while tears of gratitude stood in her eyes, and she murmured "Dearest, kindest, mamma!"

Rose, who was equally taken by surprise at this *coup-de-theatre*, also sprang up and kissed her mother exclaiming—

"Oh! I wish Violet were here."

Mrs. Vyner understood the wish, and looked delighted.

"One day," she said, with the meekness of a martyr, "she will learn to know me."

It was an exciting scene. Blanche and Rose were affected, as kind hearts always are at any action which bears the stamp of kindness; and Mrs. Vyner was affected, as most people are when they have done a generous action, with a certain inward glow of noble pleasure.

For do not suppose that she remembered at this moment whence the money actually came. Not she. In her excitable mind, the means were lost in the end. She had given the money, she had aroused the gratitude of the two girls, and, as far as her feeling of the matter went, she felt just as if the money had been hers. Indeed, so truly was she possessed with this idea, so actually generous did she feel in that moment of excitement, that on opening her purse to take out the notes, she found another ten-pound note beside it, really her own, and taking it also out she said as she presented it—

"There, you may as well have that too—you will find plenty of use for it—and I shall not miss it. There. Only be happy, and trust in me."

The sudden impulse which led her to do this—to complete, as it were, the action which she had begun with such applause—to redouble the effect of what had already been created—will be understood by all who have known, and knowing, have analyzed, such characters as Mrs. Vyner; to others it will appear a gross inconsistency.

CHAPTER V.

THE CURSE OF IDLENESS.

Or fia dunque giammai, che io, Ozio, pose esser grato veramente, se non quando succedi a degne occupazioni. L'ozio vile et inerte voglio, che ad un animo generoso sia la maggior fatica, che aver egli possa, se non gli rappresenta dopo lodabile esercizio e lavoro.

GIORDANO BRUNO.—*Spaccio.*

THE consequences of this little scene were manifold.

"Papa," said Violet to her father, on the following day, "you have done what I knew you would do, and what I accept as a presage for the future."

"And what is that, my dear?"

"Sent Blanche some money."

"Who told you so?" exclaimed he, greatly surprised.

"I divined it," she answered, with a quiet smile.

"You—you are mistaken Violet—I send—I have renounced her."

"Yes, but your heart speaks for her in secret, and in secret you send her money. Though I question whether sixty pounds—"

"Fifty," interrupted her father.

"Oh, then you did know of it?" she said, archly.

Meredith Vyner bit his lip.

"Sixty was the sum mamma gave, at any rate, because Rose, who was present, told me so."

"Kind, generous creature!" ejaculated Vyner. "She must have added the other ten

from her own purse. Violet, you have guessed aright, but keep the secret unless you wish me to withhold even my underhand charity from your wretched sister."

Violet promised to do so; but how great was her scorn of her mother's hypocrisy, when she thus found her suspicions verified! From her knowledge of her father and mother, she had at once guessed the real state of the case, and confusedly, but strongly, suspected the motive of the latter.

This was the way in which their mutual hatred was nourished. Violet was not a dupe, and her mother saw that she was not.

On Cecil, the influence of this gift was fatal.

"This comes most fortunately," he said; "for not only do I now begin to see that our income is barely sufficient to meet our scanty expenditure, but the more I advance in my 'Nero,' the more am I impressed with the necessity for not hurrying it. All great works demand time and labor. Were I to hurry the execution, I should spoil it, and too much depends upon success, for me to be precipitate."

He was sincere in saying so; he was his own dupe in asserting that what he most needed was ample leisure in which to elaborate his conception. He caught at the excuse offered to his idleness, and, like all men, covered his weakness in the imposing folds of an aphorism. The brain is singularly fertile in inventing plausible reasons to excuse weaknesses.

Labor is a sublime necessity: it is beneficence under a rude aspect. But although so beneficent to man, it is radically antipathetic to his nature. All men are *constrained* to work. Poverty or ambition are the invariable taskmasters, and it is only by dint of the strong stimulus of want, or the stronger dictates of indomitable will, that human nature, vagabond as are its tendencies, can be made to persevere in the tasks set before it.

What wonder, then, if men under all conditions avidly seize upon every occasion which enables them for a moment to escape from the tyranny of work! What wonder if this weak, wayward, susceptible Cecil, who had labored cheerily under the impulsion of necessity, now forgot the sweet delights of his daily task, and relapsed into his old habits of dreaming idleness!

There was no longer any remarkable hurry. His daily existence did not depend upon the immediate accomplishment of his task. He could wait, he could mature his plans, he could work only when the inspiration came to him; there was no need to harass an unwilling brain, he could bide his time. To any one who knew him, it would be easy to foresee that from the moment he was released from the immediate necessity of labor, his time would be frittered away in sterile efforts. It is only genius, which, goaded by an irresistible inward impulse to transmute into art all that it has felt, labors with courageous love, and sings because it can not choose but sing. Talent of every kind needs an external stimulus, and Cecil was a man of talent, not a man of genius.

Blanche confirmed him in his opinions; partly, perhaps, out of sincere belief in him and in all he said, which made her think he could not be in error; partly, also, out of a little egotism of love which made her rejoice in every hour that he could snatch from labor, to spend at her side. He was so lovable, that she would deserve pardon, even if her sex's ignorance of life had not concealed from her the enormity of her fault. There was something so caressing in his manner, that few people withstood it; and to her he was the perfection of tenderness, delicacy, and amiability. Persons of his lively, susceptible organization, are usually fascinating in their manners—there is a *laisser aller* (which in him was tempered with perfect good breeding), a frankness, a gayety, and a general consideration for the feelings and opinions of others, founded on a desire of universal approbation, which create more regard than great qualities in a less agreeable exterior. If he was charming to others, what was he to the wife he loved!

She wished to have him with her, and he was but too glad to gratify her wish. A little excursion to Richmond occupied one day; a visit to some exhibition broke in upon another. There were always pleasant walks and satisfactory excuses. He was not idle, he said; his brain was working, his ideas were gradually becoming clearer; the details stood out more distinctly in his imagination; and 'Nero' would benefit by this delay.

The effect of alms is always enervating, however it may relieve a present want; and the contributions of Mrs. Vyner were a species of alms. This was the case with Cecil. His sense of independence—his healthy confidence in his own powers—became destroyed. Had Vyner made a distinct allowance to his daughter, it would have then formed a certain part of their income, and Cecil would have no more relaxed his efforts than he did when his own small, but definite income, was all he could rely on. But this uncertain charity—this indefinite alms-giving, which Mrs. Vyner's first gift seemed to indicate, had the injurious effect of all unascertained, indeterminate assistance: it made Cecil rely on it as on a fund.

In this mental analysis, I am exhibiting motives in all their nudity, but the reader will not suppose that because I drag them into the light of day, they were as clear to Cecil, in whose breast they were enveloped in the sophisms and obscurities with which men hide from themselves their own infirmities.

As Cecil sat after breakfast, smoking his cigar, and watching the graceful involutions of the clouds he puffed before him, he honestly believed that he was not wasting his time. Because he occasionally arrested his wandering thoughts, and fixed them on his plans for "Nero," or for his Comic Opera, he fancied he was maturing them. He mistook reveries for meditation. And because in those hours of pensive idleness he made but trifling progress in the elaboration of his plans, he imagined that elaboration must necessarily be slow, and demanded more time. Thus his very infirmity was alimented, and each day's error only made the original mistake more plausible.

Who has indulged in all the enchantment of the world of reverie, wherein materials are so plastic, and triumphs are so easy—when man

seems to be endowed with the god-like privilege of creation, and his thoughts take shape without an effort, passing from the creative mind into the created act, without the hard obstacle of a medium—who is there, I say, that having known such intellectual triumph, has not felt humbled and discouraged when, descending from the region of reverie and intention to that of reality and execution, he has become aware of the immensity of labor—of hard, resolute labor—to be undergone before he can incarnate his ideas into works? The unwritten poems, the unpainted pictures—the unnoted melodies are, it is often said, transcendently superior to those poems, pictures, and melodies which artists succeed in producing. Perhaps so; but the world justly takes no account of unaccomplished promises, of unfought victories. What it applauds is the actual victory won in earnest struggle with difficulty; the heroes it crowns are those who have enriched them with trophies, not those who *might* have done so.

But Cecil was content to dream of victory—to "dally with the faint surmise" of beauty—to plan, to hope, to dream—but not to act. He would stand before his easel, looking at his canvas, or playing listlessly with the colors on his pallet, but never boldly using his pencil; and because "ideas" did not come to him in that irresolute mood, he threw the pallet down, lighted a cigar, and declared himself unfit for work that day.

He then would seat himself at the piano to try if Euterpe were more propitious. His fingers running over the keys would naturally suggest to him some melody that he liked; it was played, of course, or a fragment of it—then another fragment; then he began to sing—his voice was good, and it pleased him to hear it. In this way another hour or so would pass, and he would then take up his hat, and stroll out. Day after day was this miserable farce of "awaiting inspiration" played with the same success.

Enthusiastic artists and critics will assuredly award him their esteem, and proclaim him a genuine artist—a real genius—when they hear that Cecil had a profound contempt for "mechanical fellows," who sat down to their work whether under "inspiration," or under the mere impulse to finish what they have begun. He was really eloquent in his scorn of the "drudges." Genius, in his eyes, was a divine caprice. It came and went in moments of excitement: a sort of intermittent phrensy. Being a scholar, he entirely approved of Plato's theory to that effect, as developed in the dialogue of *Ion*. The business of an artist was consequently to await those moments, and then to set himself to work, when his soul was stung to ecstasy by overpowering visions of beauty.

There is, in the present day, an overplus of raving about genius, and its prescriptive rights of vagabondage, its irresponsibility, and its insubordination to all the laws of common sense. Common sense is so prosaic! Yet it appears from the history of art that the real men of genius did not rave about any thing of the kind. They were resolute workers, not idle dreamers. They knew that their genius was not a phrensy, not a supernatural thing at all, but simply the colossal proportions of faculties which, in a lesser degree, the meanest of mankind shared with them. They knew that whatever it was, it would not enable them to accomplish with success the things they undertook, unless they devoted their whole energies to the task.

Would Michael Angelo have built St. Peter's, sculptured the Moses, and made the walls of the Vatican sacred with the presence of his gigantic pencil, had he awaited inspiration while his works were in progress. Would Rubens have dazzled all the galleries of Europe, had he allowed his brush to hesitate? would Beethoven and Mozart have poured out their souls into such abundant melodies? would Goethe have written the sixty volumes of his works—had they not often, very often, sat down like drudges to an unwilling task, and found themselves speedily engrossed with that to which they were so averse?

"Use the pen," says a thoughtful and subtle author, "there is no magic in it; *but it keeps the mind from staggering about*"* This is an aphorism which should be printed in letters of gold over the studio door of every artist. Use the pen or the brush; do not pause, do not trifle, have no misgivings, but keep your mind from staggering about by fixing it resolutely on the matter before you, and then all that you *can* do you *will* do; inspiration will not enable you to do more. Write or paint; act, do not hesitate. If what you have written or painted should turn out imperfect, you can correct it, and the correction will be more efficient than that correction which takes place in the shifting thoughts of hesitation. You will learn from your failures infinitely more than from the vague wandering reflections of a mind loosened from its moorings; because the failure is absolute, it is precise, it stands bodily before you; your eyes and judgment can not be juggled with; you know whether a certain verse is harmonious, whether the rhyme is there or not there. But in the other case you not only *can* juggle with yourself, but *do* so; the very indeterminateness of your thoughts makes you do so. As long as the idea is not positively clothed in its artistic form, it is impossible accurately to say what it will be. The magic of the pen lies in the concentration of your thoughts upon one object. Let your pen fall, begin to trifle with blotting-paper, look at the ceiling, bite your nails, and otherwise dally with your purpose, and you waste your time, scatter your thoughts, and repress the nervous energy necessary for your task. Some men dally and dally, hesitate and trifle until the last possible moment, and when the printer's boy is knocking at the door, they begin; necessity goading them, they write with singular rapidity, and with singular success; they are astonished at themselves. What is the secret? Simply this—they have had no time to hesitate. Concentrating their powers upon the one object before them, they have done what they *could* do.

Impatient reader! if I am tedious, forgive me. These lines may meet the eyes of some to whom they are specially addressed, and may awaken thoughts in their minds not unimportant to their future career.

Forgive me, if only because I have taken

* Essays written during the intervals of business.

what is called the prosaic side! I have not flattered the shallow sophisms which would give a gloss to idleness and incapacity. I have not availed myself of the splendid tirades, so easy to write, about the glorious privileges of genius. My "preaching" may be very ineffectual; but at any rate it advocates the honest dignity of labor; let my cause excuse my tediousness.

CHAPTER VI.

A SKETCH OF FRANK FORRESTER.

These are the arts, Lothario, which shrink acres
Into brief yards—bring sterling pounds to farthings,
Credit to infamy; and the poor gull,
Who might have lived an honored easy life,
To ruin and an unregarded grave.

BEAUMONT and FLETCHER.

CECIL was rattling away on his piano one afternoon, fancying he was composing, when the door opened, and in walked a gentleman enveloped in a pea-coat, whom Cecil saluted warmly as Frank Forrester; and after endless questions and vociferous laughter on both sides, they both sat down to indulge in rapid biographical reminiscences, from the time of their last meeting.

Frank Forrester was, in every sense of the word, a man about town. He was tall and well-made, and when young must have been handsome. Although not yet forty, he looked much older, from the effects of constant debauchery. You could not look at him without misgivings. His well-shaped head was bald from the forehead to the crown, and this baldness he vainly endeavored to conceal by carefully combing the thin long hair over it which grew at the sides, and which he allowed to grow very long for that purpose. I don't know why, but there is always something particularly unpleasant in this endeavor to conceal baldness: it is a subterfuge which deceives no one, but which is resented as an attempt to deceive. In Forrester's case, perhaps, there was mingled a disagreeable conviction that he was too young to be bald, in the ordinary course of things; and those thin, straggling hairs were all that had withstood the midnight fevers and the morning headaches of his reckless life. His deep-lined brow and finely arched eyebrows surmounted two light greenish-gray eyes, not unlike those of a fox in expression. A dark rim, encircling those eyes, spoke plainly in confirmation of the bald head, and was further strengthened by the sallow complexion, stained by a hundred orgies. His mouth was large (the upper lip adorned with a manly mustache carefully trimmed and combed), and displayed teeth which a shark might not have disowned. His nose was high and haughty—curved like those of the race of Israel—a nose that commanded the other features, and which sounded like a trumpet when he blew it.

He was dressed in a style, which, though heterogeneous in its details, had a certain homogeneity of effect. A black satin stock, the falls of which were united by two enormous turquoise pins chained together; a blue pea-jacket, such as only sailors formerly permitted themselves, covered his frock-coat. Very staring plaid trowsers, cut gaiter-wise, to fit tight over the instep of his *bottes vernies*, completed his attire, if we add yellow kid gloves, and a resplendent gold and crystal mounted cane made out of the sword of a sword-fish.

This somewhat slang costume was worn in such a manner that it did not seem slang. Forrester had the "air of a gentleman," which carried off more perilous things than his costume. He looked, indeed, something of a blackleg; but it was the nobleman turned blackleg.

Frank Forrester was not exactly a blackleg, he was rather a sponge. Not over scrupulous in borrowing money, he never directly cheated. To ask for a cool hundred which he was certain of never repaying, which, indeed, he never intended to repay, was not in his eyes dishonorable; but to cheat at cards or dice was a crime with which he had never even sullied his imagination. The son of an undertaker, well to do in the world, he had been brought up as most boys are brought up, with a slight infusion of religion, administered in weekly doses, and a wavering code of ethics, enunciated and illustrated in a random and somewhat contradictory manner. When his father died he found himself at the head of a thriving business, which he detested, and in possession of a good round sum of money, which he did not class in the same category as the business. Gifted with a jovial and genial humor, great animal spirits, and the audacity of a *parvenu*, he very quickly "realized," *i. e.* disposed of the business, and began his merry career. While he was spending his money he made some acquaintances, and learned some experience, which enabled him, when all was spent, to turn his acquisitions to advantage, and make them support him. Like the noble spendthrift turned blackleg, he lost a fortune in acquiring the dexterity to gain one; or rather, learned from those who sponged upon him how he could sponge on others.

Never was there a more agreeable sponge, and no wonder that affluent greenhorns, desirous of "seeing life," should be glad to see it under his auspices and in his company. It could not be too highly paid. It was well worth the champagne and cool hundred. If a young booby must squander away the hard won-earnings of a careful father, it was right, Frank said, that he should have some pleasure for his money, and how was that pleasure to be obtained? By money? Not a bit of it! By science; and he, Frank, understood the science of spending, and "flattered himself that he did know how to make the hours roll swiftly and smoothly, provided any one were ready to grease the wheels."

Frank knew every thing, and could do every thing, that a man about town is expected to know or do. He was unequaled at billiards, strong at whist and écarté, adroit at hazard, great in culinary and cellar knowledge, knew London as well as his alphabet, and, as he expressed it, could give the most knowing "a wrinkle or two on some point or other."

One of his "wrinkles" is worth specifying. He was the first who ever got into parliament by the simple and ingenious procedure which has since had several imitators. He stood for a borough (which, for weighty reasons, shall be

nameless), where he was an utter stranger. It was one of those admirable boroughs where the workings of our electioneering system are shown to perfection, since almost every voter had his price. So notoriously corrupt was it, that one of the candidates unblushingly announced on his placards :—

"*Electors! Remember this: those who vote for * * * will not go unrewarded!*"

It was a compact little borough, purchasable at a price not difficult to calculate. The astonishment of Frank Forrester's friends, when they heard of his standing for ——, may be conceived. He replied that he was sure patriotism —pure, unmixed, British independence—was the thing voters wished for nowadays. His placards were flaming with splendid sentences. His speeches were worthy of Cato of Utica. Not a man did he bribe—not a drop of beer did he allow.

"Lor, sir!" said an independent voter to him, "it's no use your standing, if so be you're not good for a drop o' drink. We always expects a little, 'lectioneering time."

"My good friend," replied Frank, drawing himself up, magnificent in virtue, "you have utterly mistaken me. I scorn to influence any one. If my principles do not speak for me, I am content to be rejected. If the voters are desirous of having a real representative—one who reflects their passions, echoes their prejudices, advocates their interests, and argues their causes—I am the man. If they want one who will buy their votes—whose hold is not on their convictions, but on their cupidity, I am not—I say emphatically, I am *not* their man!"

The baffled voter shook his head dubiously, and muttered, "Well, well, it won't do, it won't do."

"It shall do!" majestically retorted Frank.

And it came to pass as the voter said, and as Frank said.

The returning officer announced that Frank Forrester, Esq., had obtained eleven votes.

"Electors!" said Frank, with imperturbable gravity, "I thank you for the confidence you have displayed.—(*A laugh.*) I repeat it—I thank you! You have returned my rival, and by an overwhelming majority—I hope your confidence there has not been misplaced. For myself, I still cherish the hope of one day representing you.—(*Hear! hear!* and cries of *Try the tin next time!*) Upon what do I found that hope? Upon the sincerity of my principles! You have witnessed how little I attempted to cajole or bribe you.—(*More fool you!* shouted several.) I have bought no man's vote.—(*Howls of contempt.*) Yet you have—unsought, unbought—given me eleven votes. Electors! on those eleven votes I build my hope—I may say, my certainty—of representing you. This imposing minority suffices my ambition."

Only the eleven voters, to whom he had communicated his plan of action, and one or two of his special friends, appreciated the irony which was concealed by the magnificent buffoonery of this address. But the mystery was soon revealed. Frank petitioned against his antagonist's return. The upshot was, that the liberal briber * * * was convicted of corruption, his election annulled, and Frank, on the shoulders of his "imposing minority," was carried into parliament.

Frank Forrester, as an M.P., was the torment of the whigs, who were never sure of his vote. Although, therefore, his name is not to be found in Hansard; although he neither made a motion nor seconded one during the whole of his parliamentary career; times were so "ticklish," that his vote was of importance, and he made the most of it by never absenting himself from a division, and by the impossibility of parties calculating on which side he would vote. This powever he converted into patronage, and many were the little clerkships and small situations which he was enabled to bestow on deserving young men; whether he was actuated by pure philanthropy toward the young men, or by a desire for the establishment of closer commercial relations with their parents, he never disclosed; but it was observable that the young men had invariably substantial, ready money fathers, and that Frank was invariably more assiduous at chicken-hazard after those acts of well-timed patronage.

Frank belonged to a stylish club, and had a numerous set of acquaintances; but they were almost exclusively males. "A good fellow"—"a jolly dog"—"a knowing card"—and "a loose fish:" those were the appellatives by which he was usually distinguished. He lived upon confiding young men, and an occasional turn of the wheel of fortune. He had always some new acquaintance—or rather, let me say, some inseparable friend—whom he introduced into the glories and pleasures of "life." This friendship was inviolable as long as the young man's property lasted; but as soon as the silly gull began to request repayment of loans, or to lower himself in his patron's eyes, by retrenchment of his expenditure, then Frank was either called away from London for a few weeks, or discovered some splendid young fellow who really never allowed him a moment's leisure. Frank seldom quarreled with his victims—he wanted heartlessness for that; and he never "cut" them.

Frank had "formed" Cecil, and as, when completely formed, Cecil had gone abroad, leaving Frank with a richer pupil, no shadow had darkened their friendship; and on Cecil's return, he had found the same jovial, hearty manner, in spite of his dilapidated means. This convinced him of Frank's regard; and from that moment he had made him the chosen confidant of all his schemes.

CHAPTER VII.

CECIL'S FIRST FALSE STEP.

No man can be a great enemy, but under the name of a friend; if you are a cuckold, it is your friend only that makes you so, for your enemy is not admitted to your house; if you are cheated in your fortune, 'tis your friend that does it, for your enemy is not made your trustee; if your honor or good name is injured, 'tis your friend that does it still, for your enemy is not believed against you.

WYCHERLEY.—*Plain Dealer.*

"Well, Frank, and how goes the world with *you?*" said Cecil, after having made him acquainted with the present state of his affairs.

"Tollollish!" replied Frank. "I have an ingenuous youth in training, who, I am sorry to

say, is nearly trained, or drained. Picked him up abroad—genus snob, very distinct! But snob's money I find quite as available as any other. I was going from Verviers to Cologne this summer, when in the deserted first-class carriage in which I ensconced myself, there stepped a flaxen-haired youth, of the unmistakable 'gent' style—the only real substitute for a 'gentleman.' He was soon after followed by a lathy boy, all skin and bone, with trowsers either shrunk by washing, or considerably outgrown, and fastened with *immeasurable straps*. The swagger of this boy was worth money to see. He entered into familiar conversation at once, and favored me with some biographical particulars, which were eminently trivial. At last he took out his cigar-case, and, offering it to me with an air of exquisite assumption, said—

"Do you do any thing in this way?"

"Not so early in the day."

"Lord, it doesn't matter to me what's the time o' day, I'm always ready to blow a cloud, I can tell you."

"Indeed," said I, with perfect gravity.

"Oh, yes. Do try one. I dare say it won't disagree with you. It's all fancy."

"You seem to be a fast fellow."

"I believe you."

"Do you come from London?"

"No; I'm a Southampton boy. We do it in prime style there, I can tell you."

"Oh, you do?"

"Don't we, that's all!"

"Were those trowsers built in Southampton?—they're devilish stylish—so uncommon, too!"

"Yes," replied the innocent youth, in all the verdure of his nature. "Yes, they were built at Southampton—but I don't call *them* any thing—merely put on to travel in—you should see my fawn kerseys and my plaids!"

"What, better cut?"

"Oh, no comparison."

"I should like very much to have your schneider's address. I am going to Southampton on my return to England. I suppose if I were to mention your name—"

"Lord, yes, that would be sure to do it. But he isn't a cheap tailor, mind you."

The "gent" was leaning his head out of window, nearly suffocated with suppressed laughter, and from time to time encouraging me with fierce winks to proceed.

"There," said my lathy patron, "I have written his address on one of my cards—just show him my name, and you'll find it all right."

"Pray, sir," I asked, as if suddenly eager in poultry, "when you left Southampton, what was the price of a young goose?"

This was to much for the "gent," who burst out into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. The viridity of the Southampton youth was great, but this laughter opened his eyes. He colored and exclaimed—

"Oh you want to chaff, do you? But it won't do. I shan't bite. I'm not such a fool as I look."

"That's *very* possible—Heaven forbid you should be!" said I; whereupon a fresh burst of laughter from snob *primus*, who vowed that the youth was "sold."

At the next station, *lath* left our carriage; and "gent" instantly began expressing to me his delight at the way I had "sold the snob;" which led to his becoming in turn communicative, and informing me that he had just "sacked a little tin," which it was his intention "to spend like a brick." From that moment I took him into my confidence. I have trained him. I have taught him how to dine—which he had once imagined consisted in eating what money could procure. I have taught him to live. He is no longer a snob; at least, he doesn't betray himself. But—and, damn my whiskers! this is the sad part of the business—it is the way with so many of them—now, just as he's becoming companionable, his purse is running low.

Frank sighed as he thus finished his tale, but quickly changing the subject, he said—

"Come, let's take a turn, and look in at the club."

"No, Frank, I must work."

"Nonsense! What's the use of puddling all day over your work—you only stupefy yourself. Come."

"There's some truth in what you say, I believe; the brain gets muddled by long application. Yet my picture isn't half finished yet—half!—not a quarter."

"Never mind; leave it for to-day. Damn my whiskers! I must have you to-day."

Cecil's irresolution was soon conquered; he took his hat, and went out with his chum. They strolled down to the club, where Cecil had not shown himself since his marriage. The heartiness of his welcome greatly flattered him; he felt that he was a favorite; success cheered him; his spirits rose; he became unusually brilliant.

"You must dine with us to-day, Cis," said Frank.

"Impossible, my dear fellow."

"Don't know the word, Cis. I have said you dine with us—four—jolly party; and you dine: damn my whiskers!"

"But my wife—"

"Well! Inestimable Benedict, you are not tied to her apron-string, are you? You have not submitted to the tyranny of the weaker sex! You are master?"

"I am; certainly I am; but—"

"You have never dined from home before. You shake your head. Very well, now is the time to begin."

"My dear Frank, you must know me well enough to know that I should have no scruple in following my own wishes; and although I have not yet dined from home, I have no sort of fear that when I choose to do it, my wife will make a remark. But in the present case she will be alarmed—she has no idea of my coming down here. My hours have been very regular, and if I were not to present myself at five, she would be seriously concerned about me."

"Yes, yes, it's always by that unnecessary 'concern' that women begin. What the devil is there to be concerned about? The sooner you accustom her to the accidents of life—to the impromptu parties and unexpected absences—the smoother will your life be."

"When you are married, Frank, you can manage as you please, but for me your system won't do. I love my wife, and my constant care is to make her happy."

Frank looked at him with an indescribable mixture of astonishment, incredulity, and pity; then, as a thought seemed to occur to him, said,

"But look here, Cis, the thing is easy. Just scribble a line to tell her not to expect you, that you are dining at the club, and one of the men shall take it. Will that satisfy you?"

"Perfectly."

"Then do it."

Cecil wrote thus:—

"My own sweet Pet!—Do not wait dinner for me to-day, as I am forced to dine with some influential people at the club. But I shall hurry away as soon as possible, and be with you before ten. A hundred kisses.

"Cecil."

The dinner was excellent, and the guests in high spirits. The "influential people" of whom Cecil spoke, were the great Frank himself, young Hudson (the youth in training and the amphytrion), and Tom Chetsom, jolly Tom Chetsom. The wines were not spared; and by the time the smoking-room was sought, for a quiet cigar and cup of coffee, to assist the slow, elaborate digestion of those who had dined well, Cecil was in that peculiar state which I would christen moral drunkenness. He was not tipsy, not near it. His walk was as steady, his eye as free in its movements, his vision as undisturbed as before dinner. But although neither in his gait nor conversation he betrayed the least influence of wine, yet within he felt a sort of torpor—the strong desire for a sensation which makes men reckless how they procure it, and which makes them passively adopt any plan likely to arouse them from the heavy, deadening lethargy in which their faculties are enveloped.

The smoking-room soon became intolerable to him. He wanted movement—excitement. The theater was proposed. They went. But the heat, the glare of the lights, the dazzle and confusion of the whole place, made Cecil worse. They left the house.

"What shall we do?" said jolly Tom Chetsom, as they stood under the portico of Drury-lane.

Hudson proposed the Coal-Hole; but Frank reminding him that it was too early, he was distinctly of opinion that he should not go home till morning, till daylight did appear.

"I tell you what, Tom," said Frank, "isn't it one of Hester's soirées to-night? Suppose we go there: she'll be charmed to know Cis—he's half a literary man, and wholly a painter."

"Good idea!" said Tom. "Will you go, Chamberlayne?"

"Any where. Let's start."

"Come along, then."

And they drove to Cadogan-place.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE POETESS IN LONDON.

Quid enim dulcius libero et ingenuo animo et ad voluptates honestas nato quam videre plenam semper et frequentem domum suam concursu splendidissimorum hominum? TACITUS.—*De Oratoribus.*

Le mariage se propose la vie, tandis que l'amour ne se propose que le plaisir.

BALZAC.—*Mémoires des Deux Jeunes Mariées.*

While they are driving to Cadogan-place, let us cast a retrospective glance at the fortunes of the authoress of *Gleams and Glooms*, to whose soirée they are wending.

Hester Mason had achieved a part of her ambition: she held a salon in London. How she contrived and maintained that, would take long to narrate in detail, as it was only by steady perseverance and admirable ingenuity she succeeded. On first eloping with Sir Chetsom, she had the tact never once to mention a settlement; indeed when he, in a moment of tenderness, alluded to the subject, she playfully put her hand upon his mouth, and said,—"Oh, don't begin to talk of money, or I shall think you have *bought* me. You are not going to leave me, are you?"

"Leave you, Hester?"

"Yes, leave me. It looks like it. I am poor, I know; but rich in *your love*. Make me independent, and you will think it no hardship for me to be left; it is always so with men!"

A sigh followed this. Sir Chetsom was ravished; the dupe was fooled to the top of his bent. Hester marked the effect, and from that moment knew her power. From that moment he denied her nothing. The time would come, she foresaw, when he would be completely her slave, and that was the time to make conditions.

Meanwhile, she impressed him with the notion of the necessity for their *liaison* being hidden from the world. If people did not respect her, they would not envy him. If she were not something more than his mistress, he would be not better than the common herd of men, who have their "follies." Appearances should be preserved for all sakes. Sir Chetsom admitted the truth of this, reserving to himself the privilege of disclosing his secret at the club, by intelligible hints and half-confidences.

He had given her a house; he had brought there the nucleus of a literary and artistic society. Hester received every Wednesday evening, and as her parties had a certain piquancy, they were well attended. The great difficulty was to get women. That is always the stumbling block of an equivocal position. Men are willing enough to go any where, if they are amused, and to ask no questions, or at least to affect no prudery. With women, the case is wholly different. Accordingly, with what untiring perseverance do women in equivocal positions manœuvre to obtain the presence of virtuous women at their houses! How they pet them, how full of delicate attentions and substantial kindness! What cajoleries, what adroit insinuations, what flattering prospects they set forth to dazzle their "dear friends!" What twaddle they will listen to for hours, with the eagerness of curious interest; what confidences accept! It is one of the most amusing scenes in the comedy of society to witness the grateful attentions of a woman who is not "received," to those of her female acquaintance who shut their eyes to her real position, or are ignorant of it. You see a pretty, lively, clever, graceful, dashing woman of the world exerting all her coquetries to cajole some ugly, stupid, awkward, underbred

woman whose "countenance" she wants. She imagines that the presence of a few "modest women," no matter what their unattractiveness, will give her salon an air *comme il faut*. But it deceives no one. It only renders her salon a little less agreeable.

Hester managed, as others manage, to collect a few complaisant women, and a man or two old enough, stupid enough, and respectable enough, to keep them in countenance; and she had a salon.

Sir Chetsom Chetsom was rich and lavish. Without asking for it, Hester contrived to have almost every thing she wished for. His vanity, at first only tickled by the conquest, was now always alive to the maintenance of that conquest. She made him feel that his position was insecure: it was done delicately, but it was done. To the dread of being left by her in favor of another, was soon added the dread of losing her for own sake. He had become accustomed to her. She amused him, occupied him, captivated him. When she pouted, he was in despair; when she caressed him, he was in raptures. The old boy was alternately alarmed at her perception of the difference in their ages, and flattered at the conviction that, in spite of that difference, she really loved him. She was always playing upon two themes. First theme.—Why should I waste my youth and love upon a selfish old monster? Second theme.—How infinitely preferable is the love of a man who has seen the world, and lost the first illusions of youth, to the capricious tenderness of a boy!

Give those themes to a clever woman, and imagine the variations she would play upon them!

Although Hester had achieved a part of her ambitious plans, it must not be supposed that she was either satisfied or happy. She had kicked the dust of Walton from her feet. She was in the capital, and surrounded by luxury. She had a salon to which many celebrities were visitors. But neither Sir Chetsom nor her visitors could make *Gleams and Glooms* popular. Not a copy was sold. Not a journal of any standing took the least notice of it. Some exaggerated criticisms, bristling with notes of admiration, and sonorous with epithets of praise, did indeed appear; but they appeared in journals of no character, and bore the evident stamp of the puff direct. She sent a copy, with a flattering letter, to every author whose name rose above the herd into some distinction. From the majority, she received no acknowldgement; from a great many came letters instantaneously acknowledging the "receipt" of the volume, but not a word on its contents; from some few poets she received general and vague flatteries, together with copies, "from the authors," of *their* last new poems. A delicate attention, expressive of this golden rule—Praise me, and I'll praise you.

Having consoled herself with the conviction that the age was a prosaic age, averse to poetry, she began a novel, hoping to gain celebrity by that.

In noting the latent causes of her dissatisfaction, I have said nothing of Sir Chetsom. That she was not happy, while forced to act the degrading character of mistress to such a man, will be understood; she used him as the ladder by which to ascend the height which beckoned in the distance; but she thoroughly despised him, and at times despised herself.

On the Wednesday evening chosen by Frank Forrester for the introduction of Cecil to the fair muse, Hester was looking particularly well. A flush of animation gave a tint to her cheek, and additional fire to her dark eyes. In her raven hair a string of costly pearls were woven; large, glittering bracelets encircled her well-shaped arms; and a black velvet dress set off to perfection her handsome bust, which was lavishly displayed. She was seated on the sofa, propounding some humanitarian doctrine, when the four were announced. She rose graciously. Tom Chetsom apologized for the liberty he had taken in bringing Mr. Chamberlayne, who was very desirous of the honor, &c.

"Any friend of yours will always be welcome, Mr. Chetsom," she said, smiling, "and Mr. Chamberlayne particularly so. I have often heard his name, and always accompanied by some flattering epithet."

Cecil bowed.

Frank then presented Hudson, and Cecil noticed, that although she also received him with a gracious smile, there was a marked difference in her manner. Strange animals that we are! this flattered him exceedingly.

The rooms were full; and conversation was lively in groups. It was a curious assembly when the details were examined, and had little of that *éclat* which Hester had imagined in her dreams. The men, for the most part, were neither young nor aristocratic; they were—at least some of them—not positively unknown to fame; small reputations, current only in literary circles—scarcely heard beyond those circles; men of talent, men of worth, men of energy and of ambition, but scarcely at ease in society. Mixed with these were a few of Sir Chetsom's club-men, a few harmless respectabilities, and a few—very few—women.

One of these women was requested to oblige with one of her charming performances, and her harp was wheeled into the center of the room. It is one of the penalties attached to the condition of such women as Hester, that if their dear female friends have any little accomplishment, they must be implored to exhibit it. In any other society, Miss Blundell would no more have been asked to perform, than Gunter's waiters would be asked to dance. But to secure Miss Blundell, Hester could not avoid inviting her to play. If Hester wanted countenance, Miss Blundell wanted admiration. And it was really comic to see the mistress of the house threading the crowd of visitors, and entreating their attention to the fantasia with which Miss Blundell was about to favor them.

The hubbub of conversation was almost stilled, and Miss Blundell advanced to take possession of her harp.

"She's ugly enough for a genius," whispered Frank to Hester. Hester put her finger on her lip to command his silence.

Frank's observation was just. Miss Blundell was not handsome. Of an age so uncertain that it is denominated a "certain age," she wore her black hair in a girlish crop. On

a low, square, rugged forehead sparkled a *Sévigné*. Wondering eyebrows overarched two sunken eyes; a graceless nose and insignificant mouth did *not* tempt an artist to fix them on his canvas. In accordance with the juvenility of her style, she was robed in white muslin, displaying a scraggy, tawny neck, fierce and protuberant shoulder-blades, and disreputable arms. Certainly nothing but great skill could exonerate such ugliness.

She began by a rattling sweep over the strings, and an audacious display of elbows. Having thus fixed attention, she paused and sought inspiration from the ceiling. Genius always does. I know not what mystic influence there may be in a white-washed *plafond*; but it appears there is something of the kind, since rhymes, tropes, and melodies are drawn therefrom. Miss Blundell found music there. A few seconds of silent invocation brought down the muse, and she flogged the harp into the Gustavus gallop.

There are players of no feeling, and players of too much feeling. Miss Blundell was of the latter class. She despised execution (with some private reasons for so doing), and thought music should have a soul. Feeling was all in all with her, and feeling she threw into every thing. Even this mad, giggling, joyous, whirling, rattling gallop was not free from her sentimental caprice. She began *con spirito*, which suddenly changed, at the fourth bar, from *allegro vivace* to an *ad libitum rallentando*, expressive of the deepest emotion, the player's eyes thrown upward as if in rapt devotion. The notes died away in a "billowy ecstasy of woe," immediately succeeded by a fiery *allegro*, which again subsided into a pathetic *rallentando*.

An ironical murmur of applause followed this display, and Hester pressed her hand as she thanked, complimented, and led her back again to the sofa.

"Was it not charming?" she asked Frank, in a tone intentionally audible.

"Amazing!" replied he; then adding, in an under tone, "she is the Orpheus of private life: as witness the effect she produces on the animals here. I hope she hasn't turned the cream."

"You are a sad man—so satirical!"

"Not I. Your friend delights me; she's original."

"Well, I am no musician myself; but I believe she is."

"Yes, as cats are musicians."

Hester laughed, and turned to Cecil; but Frank instantly recalled her attention, by saying—

"Do tell me who is that old buffer leaning against the mantle-piece. Is it Miss Blundell's brother?"

"Yes."

"Of course—I knew it—he *could* be nobody else's brother. Do study him. He'll do for your novel. Look at him, Cis. Observe that blue coat, is it not immeasurably, audaciously, sublimely impossible! The short waist, the large collar, like a horse-collar, the brass buttons, and scanty skirt! When was it made? In what dim remoteness of the mythic ages was it conceived and executed? What primitive and most ancient Briton first wore it? By Jove! I must ask the address of his tailor."

"No, no, Frank, for God's sake, don't."

"Then the flaming shawl-waistcoat, the gray trowsers strapped so tightly over those big, many-bunioned feet, the eye-glass, the flower in his button-hole, the withered, smiling face, the jaunty juvenility of this most withered individual! Really, Miss Mason, you ought to make a collection from us all, for the privilege of seeing this unedited burlesque, this fabulous curiosity! He is a mummy unembalmed!"

The drollery of Frank's manner was irresistible, and both Hester and Cecil were bursting with laughter, when the unconscious object approached them, and asked Hester whether some one else would not add to the harmony of the evening.

"I am quite sure," he added, with a gallant bow, "that to your numerous accomplishments you add the gift of song."

Hester excused herself.

"You look like a singer," said Frank to him with perfect gravity. "I see it in your manner. Is it not so?"

A withered smile and feeble shake of the head was Mr. Blundell's answer.

"Well, well, I suppose all the musical genius of the family is centered in your charming sister. What a player! What a touch—or rather what a pull!"

"Humph! yes, not bad."

"So much feeling! Feeling is the thing, sir. It is soul, passion, poetry. Feeling's the chap for me! A poet, sir?"

"No."

"You look like one."

"No; I am merely a dabbler. I follow in the wake of intellectual men. I have some humor. My friends think me a sort of 'Boz'—that certainly is my line. But I have no pretensions."

"Have you written much?"

"A good deal. I have written for 'Blackwood.'"

"Indeed!"

"Yes; but they never printed what I sent them. I don't know why. Perhaps, because I am not a Scotchman. They are very jealous of English writers. Had I been a Scotchman they would have jumped at my papers; so my friends tell me."

"The scoundrels!" said Frank; but whether he meant the Scotchmen, or the friends, remains undecided.

"My friend Mr. Donkin, the celebrated epic poet (the author of 'Mount Horeb,' you know), thought my papers very funny, very; but 'Blackwood' actually rejected some poems of his, as well as a 'Dissertation on the conditions of the Intellectual Epopæ.' Do you write, sir?"

"Yes; letters."

Blundell was puzzled. He could not, from Frank's manner, detect whether this was a *naïveté* or a sarcasm.

"A very literary employment too," said Cecil, "according to the landlady of one of my friends. He was looking at apartments in Brighton, and before concluding, he asked his landlady whether she had other lodgers?

"'Only one gentleman, sir,' she said, 'rather

an eccentric gentleman. I suppose you know him, sir, it's Mr. Shakspeare.'

"'I have not the pleasure of knowing Mr. Shakspeare.'

"'Don't you, sir? *He's the great writer!*'

"'Ah, the great writer!'

"'Yes; but lor, sir, *writer as he is*, he has only written two letters all the time he has been in my house!'"

Blundell laughed feebly, though a funny man—a sort of "Boz" his friends told him; he did not see the joke, but laughed because the others laughed.

At this moment Sir Chetsom Chetsom was announced. "How late you are!" said Hester, reproachfully; but she paid him no attention during the rest of the evening, and his manner to her was eminently respectful.

Cecil was amused. He conversed with some clever men, and was flattered by his own success; he was a really good talker, often brilliant, always amusing. Hester took a great fancy to him, and engaged him in several discussions on rather perilous topics for a young man and a young woman to discuss. In them Cecil felt uneasy. He was not on equal ground in talking to a young woman, and although she piqued him to continue, he felt himself at a disadvantage.

"You forget," he said at last, in the midst of an argument on marriage, "that I am a married man, and therefore can not espouse your view."

"Truly, but why can you not? Because the present odious law of marriage is all in favor of the men."

"I demur to that."

"Men make the laws, and make them for their own advantage. Think of the gross injustice! Woman must not only be rigorously pure, but must even be kept in ignorance as complete as watchfulness will admit of; but a man may have had a hundred low amours, and no father refuses to give him a daughter. Purity, which is supposed to be woman's greatest virtue, is never thought of in a man. Why should not a girl demand that her lover be as pure as herself? Why should woman be hopelessly disgraced for that which in a man is venial? I know what you will say; but I repeat that marriage is an unholy institution. Think of the suicides committed by women who have been seduced; did you ever hear of the seducer shooting himself? Think of the wretched wives who have died broken-hearted, of the outcasts of society—outcasts for that which disgraces no man. What is it all owing to? the law of marriage! Besides the fearful crimes and desperate acts which the law of marriage causes, look at the thousands of young, healthy, affectionate girls, who wither in unblessed virginity, who never know the joys of maternity. And mark the glorious inconsistency of men: you keep us ignorant, you keep us from equal privileges, you shut us from the world of action, and your sole argument for it is, that nature has unfitted us for it; that we are inferior creatures, whose organization is specially adaped to the bearing, rearing, and nursing of children; yet this, for which alone we were created, your barbarous law of marriage denies to a frightful number; wretched girls who wither in the hope of finding husbands."

"That the law of marriage," answered Cecil, "transmutes a desire into a crime is very true. But the law of property is open to the same objection. A man covets your money or your plate; the law of property forces him either to break into your house, perhaps to murder you, or to restrain his desires. But because men are hanged for murder, no one really wishes to abolish the law of property; because men are transported and imprisoned for frauds and felonies, it is no argument against a law of property."

"That I admit."

"Then, surely you must admit, that although the law of marriage may punish those who infringe its precepts, it is not therefore to be abolished."

"No; but there is this difference: the principles of justice and moral education may control the desire of despoiling or defrauding another of his property, but human passion owns no such stern control. Love is beyond volition. The husband can not will to love his wife, the wife can not will *not* to love another. Reason is powerless against the passion, because the woman loves before she is aware of it. She does not see the danger till she is enveloped in it. Marriage is indissoluble, but passion is capricious. It is foolish, impious, for a human being to swear that he will love another eternally. Passion, in its intensity, always believes in its eternity. But who can answer for the continuance of love? Who can say, 'I will not change?' Because we foresee no change, are we to shut our eyes to the experience of ages; to our own experience, even, which tells too plainly of the mutability of passion? Yet marriage is indissoluble!"

"And rightly so," said Cecil, "for this one reason—whatever is inevitable soon ceases to be a hardship; the very power which human beings have of adapting themselves to almost any condition, makes them accept their fate with tranquillity, provided that fate be certain and unequivocal. Passion is, as you say, mutable, capricious. But, in the generality of cases, the mere consciousness of the indissolubility of the marriage tie acts as a check upon the roving fancy."

Hester shook her head.

"This much I will grant," continued Cecil, "that as a matter of sentiment, as a mere question of *love*, I think you are in the main correct; but as a matter of practical civilization, as a civil institution which regards the whole framework of society, I think you—pardon me—altogether wrong."

The clock on the mantle-piece struck one as he said this, and its sharp, thin note struck like ice upon his heart, as he remembered that his beloved Blanche was sitting up, awaiting him, and had been since ten o'clock. He took a hasty leave of Hester, promising to renew the conversation some other evening, and, with a whisper to Frank, withdrew.

Hester saw him depart, with a vague feeling of regret. To understand this, we must not only recall the sudden friendship all have known sometimes to spring up in one evening's intercourse, but we must also consider Hester's pe-

culiar position. She was then just recovering from the shock her illusions had sustained with reference to men of genius. In her provincial and poetical ignorance, she had imagined that every man of remarkable powers must be captivating in appearance. Apollo in the shape of Vulcan was a monstrosity which had never distorted her dreams. I do not mean that she supposed every distinguished poet, novelist, or critic was as handsome as a guardsman. She was prepared for daring oddities of appearance; and was more likely to be captivated by the "flashing eyes and floating hair," by the wild irregularities of an inspired face, than by the lineal correctness of a beauty-man. But she was prepared to find singularity and youth: a striking appearance joined to all the ardor and impetuosity of youth. In both she was deceived. The men she saw were for the most part undistinguishable in appearance from the rest of the world, and when distinguishable, not picturesquely so. Above all, they were not young.

It is rather curious at first, to one unfamiliar with the artistic world, to see how little youth is to be met with among the celebrities. Our young poets are middle-aged men; our rising authors are bald; our distinguished painters are passing into the "sere and yellow leaf;" our *very* "young Englanders" are getting gray and pursy.

The truth is, life is short and art is long; and although a privileged man does sometimes, in the ardor of youth, reach the summit of reputation by a bound, either from the prodigal richness of his genius, or from having hit the favor of the moment, yet, as a general rule, celebrity is slowly gained, and not without many years of toilsome effort. Mastery requires immense labor. Before the proper power over materials can be gained, the artist must have spent enormous labor; and before that power can be exerted in any striking way, the artist must have lived much, suffered much, and observed much. Celebrity is not easily gained nowadays The lavish abundance of talent daily, weekly, and monthly squandered upon fugitive productions, makes it no easy matter to rise above the ordinary level; while the multiplicity of works so far exceeds all reading powers to keep pace with them, that, for an author to gain more than a limited and temporary reputation, it is necessary he should either be very lucky, or very earnest, hard-working, resolute, and clever. But before he has attained sufficient mastery to command respect, the gray hairs begin to show themselves. He must have made many efforts, struck many blows, before the way is opened to him, before the world will recognize him.

What a shock, then, to Hester, when she found, one after the other, all were middle-aged men. The ardor and freshness in their works was but the reminiscence of a youthhood which required the mastery of manhood to mold it. The men she had admired, of whom she had made idols, when she saw them as they were, with deep-lined faces, thin hair, deficient teeth, and all the signs of premature middle age, created a feeling of disappointment almost amounting to disgust. She forgot that, in straining their voices to be heard above the crowd, they had grown husky by the time they had succeeded.

Cecil was the first young, handsome man whom she had seen, and who, although not yet known to fame, had a sort of drawing-room reputation; she was charmed with him; his wit, vivacity, gentlemanly manner, and handsome countenance, were all calculated to make a deep impression upon her. Without acknowledging to herself the interest she felt in him, she allowed her thoughts to dwell upon what he had said, and how he had looked, rather more than was safe for her peace of mind.

CHAPTER IX.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

When Blanche received Cecil's note, informing her that he was to dine at the club, she felt truly glad. Ill as she could spare his company, especially in such a house as Mrs. Tring's, she felt glad. The good little thing forgot her own loss in the idea of his pleasure. She was so delighted that he was going to enjoy himself for once among his old friends. After the miserable fare of their boarding-house, how he would relish the cuisine of his club! He wanted a little change. He wanted relaxation: he overworked himself.

This was the way little Blanche accepted her husband's first absence from home. I dare say, thin-lipped madam, you wholly disapprove of her simplicity; you think she did not understand men and husbands; that she showed false generosity. You would not have taken it so quietly—not you! In her place, you would at once have seen through the selfishness and want of attention which permitted a husband, so newly married, to leave his wife in that way, and return to his vile bachelor haunts. In her place, you would have sat up for him, cowering under a huge shawl, careful that the candles should be burned to the last inch, you having allowed the fire to go out; and you would have received him either in the sullen dignity of silence, or with hot, fast-falling tears.

In her place:—But Blanche, my dear madam, had not your thin lips and fretful organization. She was an innocent, artless, affectionate, little creature, adoring her husband, believing herself unworthy of him, and only happy in his happiness. She lived for him. If he was happy by her side, it gave her exquisite delight; if he was happy, away from her, she felt, indeed, the void of his absence; but the thought of his being amused, took from absence its pain. Jealousy she had none. Her trusting nature could not harbor it: certain of his love, to question it would be profanity.

So till ten o'clock she occupied herself cheerily enough. After that, she began to expect him. Eleven struck. "He has been kept later than he intended," she said.

A novel was on the table. She began to read it. Cecil's face was constantly dancing on the page; and, once or twice, when the author mentioned convivial dinners, she pictured to herself Cecil surrounded by admirers, the wine passing freely, no one heeding the time; and, as the clock struck twelve, she said, "He is greatly amused."

There was something of the sublime devotion of woman's love in this quiet reflection, which, as in all generosity, had its own sweet recompense. The thought made her happy, and hid from her the fact that it was twelve o'clock, and she was waiting for him.

She continued her novel.

Cecil was hurrying home, very uneasy at having staid out so late. The stupor which wine had occasioned was quite gone, and he began to reproach himself for having accompanied Chetsom to Hester's. He had never left Blanche before. How could she have passed her evening? What would her anxiety be when ten, then eleven, then twelve, then one o'clock struck, and he not at home! What excuse should he make?

Nothing can better express the difference between Cecil and Blanche, than these two thoughts:—

"He is greatly amused!"

"What excuse shall I make?"

The confidence and love of the one is not more distinctly indicated by the first, than the weakness of the other is by the second.

No excuse was needed. When he arrived home, instead of reproaches, silent or expressed, he was met with kisses and joyous questions. All she seemed curious about was, how he had been amused. For herself, she had passed the time pleasantly enough. Her work and her novel had amused her. Oh, he wasn't to think himself of such consequence: existence was not insupportable without him—for a few hours!

Cecil took both her hands in his, and pressing his lips upon her lovely eyes, felt deeply, inexpressibly, what a treasure he had got; but he said nothing; nor was it necessary to say it. She understood him.

Cecil was careful not to whisper a word of Hester's equivocal position to Blanche, who imagined Miss Mason to be some worthy old maid.

On the following Wednesday, Cecil again went to Hester's, and again spent a pleasant evening. He there met some painters, whom he was desirous to know. This gave a coloring of business to his visits—a pretext to himself, for Blanche needed none.

The more Hester saw of Cecil, the more he engaged her fancy, and, at last, her affections. Of this he was wholly unconscious. His own love for his wife was an amulet against all Hester's coquetries. But although no harm as yet had come to his affections, through this acquaintance with Hester, who could say that it would long continue thus? Cecil must discover her affection in time, and then—

Yet into this peril did Blanche innocently urge him. She knew he was amused there; she knew he there extended his acquaintance among artists; and she was happy that he should take the relaxation of one evening in the week.

The peril was, however, twofold; it was not only that Cecil should be entangled by Hester—that was an uncertainty; it was also—and this more certain—that the poor, struggling artist, by nature indolent, and by accident now pampered in his indolence, should, in these club dinners and conversaziones, once more have the desire for luxury awakened in him, and a distaste for his present condition render it insupportable.

This latter peril was, perhaps, the more formidable of the two. Cecil fell into it. The oftener he went to his club—he had never ceased paying his subscription, having always had the prospect of very soon being in a condition to belong to a club with propriety—the oftener he went there, the greater his disgust at the gloomy house, and niggardly fare of the home he had chosen. Unhappily, he could not leave it. Partly, because his funds made its cheapness all-important; partly, because he still hoped its beggary would work upon Meredith Vyner's feelings.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE FEIGNED AND LOVE CONCEALED.

Fidelia. You act love, sir! you must but act it indeed, after all I have said to you. Think of your honor, sir:—love!

Manly. Well, call it revenge, and that is honorable. I'll be revenged on her.

WYCHERLEY.—*The Plain Dealer.*

WHEN the Vyners returned to town, and Rose discovered that Julius was in Italy, the grief which had assailed her, in the first remorse at having played with his affection, was crossed with a certain feeling of indignation at the calmness, as she called it, with which he accepted his fate. This was very unreasonable, I allow; very. It was not at all like a heroine; but it was like a woman, I believe; and certainly like Rose.

For you must understand that my little darling, Rose, so exquisitely pretty, so witty, so charming, and so good *au fond*, was by no means faultless. She had her whims and caprices, her faults and her follies, just as if she were an ordinary woman, and not the heroine of a novel. If I were painting women as they *should be*, of course no speck or flaw would I permit upon the radiant loveliness of my picture; but women as they *are*—the darlings!—admit of no such flattery.

Rose reasoned thus—"He *must* know I love him; or, if he is so blind as not to have seen it, he ought at least to have persevered. Who ever heard of a man giving up a women in that cool way, because she did not throw herself into his arms, the first moment it pleased him to declare himself? He can't be really in love. He is *rationally* attached to me; and reason tells him to—go to Italy! Does he expect I am to follow him? does he expect I am to write to him? does he expect I am to be peni-

tent? He is greatly mistaken! I will forget him; I will!"

But she could not. She was angry with him; but his image was constantly before her. A spirit naturally high, and fostered into a sort of pugnacity by the experience of her school life, Rose was at all times too apt to rebel against the least opposition, and never learned to brook what could be construed into an insult. Julius's conduct seemed to her an insult. Either it was dictated by a coolness not akin to genuine love, or it was dictated by a desire to make her repent her refusal. She adopted both suggestions alternately, and both she construed into an offense. Her pride was roused, and the struggle between pride and love had thrown her into that "slight fever" of which she spoke to Blanche.

She went into society with the determination of forgetting Julius, and of finding some one to replace him in her heart—but found no one.

Violet began to suffer the depressing forebodings of jealousy. She loved Marmaduke, and confessed it to herself. His attentions to Mrs. Vyner at first irritated her, because she thought them hypocritical, knowing his opinion of that false woman; and she could not brook the idea of his stooping to conciliate one he despised, although he did so merely to gain a frequent admission to the house. But after a little while she fancied there was *more* in his attentions, and that they had another aim.

This idea was slow in gaining ground, but it gained it steadily. Unwilling as she must have been to believe it—both on account of Mrs. Vyner being married, and also on account of Marmaduke's very expressive attentions to herself, nevertheless there was no withstanding the horrible suggestions of appearances; and combat them as she might, they gained ground in her mind. Now rising into something like a certainty, now driven back again by some word, look, or act which spake too plainly of his love for her; but advancing and receding, and advancing and receding again, like the alternating progress of a tide flowing in, this horrible idea gained upon her.

Marmaduke's conduct was indeed calculated to foster that suspicion. He was placed in a strange position. Violet he loved, ardently loved; but his impetuous nature somewhat curbed itself before her equally haughty and still more powerful mind. Violet had the superiority of moral elevation, and moral firmness. Marmaduke, though firm and dauntless, was more volatile; his organization was of that nervous and impressionable order, which, although capable of carrying him with indomitable firmness through any thing he willed, was nevertheless more easily swayed by the caprice and passion of the moment, than the more self-sustained, calm strength of Violet. He instinctively stood in a sort of awe of her. He bowed down to her superior nature, which he admired and worshiped; but he did not feel so much her slave as Mary Hardcastle had made him feel hers.

Perhaps this difference arose from the changes which had taken place in his own nature, since the time when Mary Hardcastle had called him hers. I know not. Certain it is that the tiny, sylph-like Mary exercised an almost absolute power over him; while the imperial Violet cowed, but did not master him. Above all, he was repelled by Violet's coldness. If in the country she had sometimes damped his ardor by her haughty reserve, she had, since their arrival in town, scarcely ever unbended, for she was hurt at his attentions to Mrs. Vyner.

From time to time he fancied he discerned in her manner a secret passion for him, and then his devotion to her was such as to irritate Mrs. Vyner with tormenting suspicions. But these were only passing moods; Violet soon relapsed into her old manner, and the baffled, indignant Marmaduke turned impatiently again to Mrs. Vyner.

As love seemed denied him, at least he would secure his revenge. To secure that, required immense thought and ingenuity. He bestowed upon it the patience and finesse of a savage. It was a drama which called forth all his faculties, and which, as it might deepen into tragedy at any moment, kept him in a state of intense excitement, and greatly confused his moral perceptions.

The last sentence is one upon which I would lay great stress, because it enables me to explain Marmaduke's actions, which, however, inexcusable, are not to be judged as if they were the results of calm deliberation. Passion blinded him, as it blinds all men; confused his judgment while sharpening his instincts; and altogether distorted his sense of moral rectitude.

Nor is this all: the excitement not only confused his moral sense, but also, by a physiological law, the subtle power of sympathy, changed what was originally a pretense into a reality. The love we begin by feigning, we end by feeling; at least so far as the mere sensuousness of the feeling goes. Excitement at all times has a singular power of awakening into life the germs of vague desires. It intensifies a thought into a desire, a desire into a passion.

Marmaduke began by feigning a return of his former love for Mrs. Meredith Vyner. Her artful doubts increased his desire to convince her. His increased eagerness gave greater sharpness and distinctness to that desire. Carried away by his own acting, he began at last to feel some of the passion of his part. Memory recalled the charms he once adored; and Mrs. Vyner was there in all the fascination of her strange beauty, to make his pulses vibrate as of old. The spell of those tiger eyes; the perfume of that golden hair; the witchery of that fantastic manner, began to move the voluptuousness within him, as before. And the very restraints imposed upon him no less by her position, than by her adroit avoidance of him, irritated him the more. She would not permit him to breathe a word of his passion. She would not suffer him to take her hand; to his ardor she opposed her affectation of moral scruples, and what "was due to her husband!" She kept him at a distance, without forbidding him the house.

The result was, that desire intensified the passion of revenge. He not only burned to conquer, in order that he might gratify the dark passion which was rankling in his heart, as it only rankles in those "children of the sun,"

but also because the woman he hated fascinated him.

This fascination will be incomprehensible to those whose colder temperaments, or more limited experience, have not brought home to them the fact that we may at once despise and admire; that we may have indeed a positive contempt for a person in whose presence we are as if under a spell.

The secret is, that esteem and respect are founded upon moral sympathies and judgments; but the charm of beauty and manner appeals to the more sensuous and emotional parts of our nature, and these, while the charm continues, triumph.

Thus Marmaduke, when alone, despised Mrs. Meredith Vyner, as one who knew her; but in her presence he was often strangely fascinated. Did he then cease to love Violet? Not he. His heart never wavered; never for an instant did she step from off the pedestal on which his love had placed her. True that, owing to the wide signification in which the word Love is used, he may have been said at times to love Mrs. Vyner, because he certainly often felt for her that desire which is all some men know of love. But call it by what name you please, it had no affinity to the love he felt for Violet.

And Mrs. Vyner! She was proud, excessively proud of her triumph. She watched Violet's dawning jealousy, and deepening sadness, with a quiet savageness, horrible to think of; and she noted the increasing entanglement of Marmaduke in her net, with the pride of a coquette regaining her prey, and triumphing over a handsomer and younger woman.

She never for an instant doubted Marmaduke's sincerity; and although his attentions to Violet sometimes irritated her, she deceived herself by supposing that he only paid them to excite her jealousy.

I have observed a paradoxical fact in human nature, which I here record, without professing to explain it; and it is this—hypocrites are easily duped by the hypocrisy of another, and liars are always credulous. La Rochefoucauld has also noticed that "quelque défiance que nous ayons de la sincérité de ceux qui nous parlent, nous croyons tonjours qu'ils nous disent plus vrai qu'aux autres." I suppose it is in both cases our confidence in our own sagacity which misleads us; but there is the fact—let moralists make what they can of it.

Well, this fact explains to us why that consummate actress, Mrs. Meredith Vyner, was completely duped by the acting of Marmaduke, the truth of whose passion she never thought of doubting. And what was said before respecting the effect of acting upon the mind, and its changing pretense into reality, must also be applied to her: with all the greater force arising from her mind not being in any way disposed against him, as his mind was against her. If he, who hated her, was insensibly led to feel something of the passion which he feigned, how much more likely would she be to admit the same influence, her mind being free from all dislike?

She began to love him, but it was in *her* way: with the head not the heart, with her senses not her soul!

CHAPTER II.

DOUBTS CHANGED INTO CERTAINTIES.

Violet's fears were soon to be confirmed.

The reader may remember a certain Mrs. Henley, mentioned in our prologue as the friend who consented to favor the meetings of Marmaduke and Mary, and whose kindness Mary never, never could forget. He will not be surprised to hear that Mary Hardcastle, on becoming Mrs. Meredith Vyner, considerately cut her former friend; a proceeding which so much astonished Mrs. Henley, that she declared she had "always expected as much."

Now this Mrs. Henley was a sort of distant cousin of the anecdotical Mrs. Merryweather, who boarded at the Tring establishment. Mrs. Henley calling one day upon her cousin, was shown into that gloomy reception-room the reader knows, and there, among other subjects of gossip, the fellow-boarders of Mrs. Merryweather were biographically and critically touched upon by that lively lady. When she came to Blanche, and mentioned her being the daughter of no less a person than Meredith Vyner, Esq., Mrs. Henley interrupted her to give a detailed character of Mrs. Vyner, with an eloquent account of her base ingratitude, and of the shameful way in which she had treated poor Mr. Ashley.

This information Mrs. Merryweather, of course, imparted to Blanche, with more circumlocutions and interspersed anecdotes than the reader would like to have set down here. Blanche, aware of the state of her sister's affections, felt somewhat uneasy on learning Marmaduke's previous attachment; and although she did not guess how matters stood, yet the idea of his having so far forgotten his former love, as to pay court to a step-daughter greatly puzzled her.

The next time Violet and Rose called upon her, she communicated to them the information she had received. Rose was greatly scandalized, Violet deeply moved.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Rose, "to think of mamma having behaved so! But can it be true? Yes: the information is too precise. Yet Marmaduke has forgiven—"

"But not forgotten her," said Violet, in a calm, stern voice.

"What do you mean!"

"He loves her still."

"Violet!"

"I am very serious."

"And his attentions to you—!"

"Hypocrisy!"

"Impossible! Violet, how can you think so ill of people?"

"You often ask me, Rose, how I can think so ill of mamma. Yet you have to-day heard that which will partly justify me. You believe that mamma assists dear Blanche, by money saved from her own allowance. I know that it is papa who sends the money. I tell you she is made up of falsehood."

"But Marmaduke?"

"Of him I thought better—yet you see?"

"I see nothing. He loves you—has forgiven mamma, and is attentive to her merely to gain opportunities of seeing you."

Violet shook her head mournfully.

"Do not condemn him unheard, Violet. Watch him closely, then question him. You know not what explanation he may have. Oh! do not let there be more misunderstanding in our family."

Violet had turned away her head to conceal her tears, but the effort was in vain; her uncontrollable grief burst forth more violently from having been awhile restrained.

She resolved to bring Marmaduke to an explanation that evening, and the resolution calmed her.

It so happened that during the day Marmaduke had been more than usually irritated by Mrs. Vyner's manner. He had spoken to her eloquent words of love, and demanded a return; the more impassioned he became, the more she drew back behind her position as a married woman.

"You love me," he exclaimed, "I know you love me. You can not deny it."

"Marmaduke, I have already told you this is language I must not, will not listen to."

"Answer me: can you deny it?"

"I shall answer nothing of the kind."

"But I insist."

"If I must leave the room," she said, "if you force me to leave it—and unless you change the subject, I shall certainly do so—this will be the last time I shall ever trust myself in your presence."

He rose, and took up his hat, as if to depart.

"Mary, you will repent this."

She only shrugged her shoulders.

He moved toward the door.

"Do you dine here to-day?" she said, with an affectation of carelessness, through which pierced an entreaty.

"No."

He left her in anger. He did not dine there that day, but he came in during the evening. Rose and Violet, watching his manner very closely, could see nothing in it but polished courtesy, mixed with some slight indications of dislike toward Mrs. Vyner, unmixed courtesy toward Meredith Vyner, and unmistakable affection for Violet.

In truth, he was more attentive to Violet that evening, owing to the scene just recorded; and when Mrs. Vyner proposed a game at chess he declined it, on the ground that he should not be able to stay long enough that evening; he was engaged to two parties. Yet he never moved from Violet's side until past eleven!

"Well," said Rose, as she went into Violet's room that night, "What do you say now?"

"I think you are right."

"I am sure of it."

"And yet, Rose—place yourself in my position—is it not horrible to think of his having once loved her?"

Rose felt that it was, but unwilling to say so, merely remarked that he was then but a boy, and boys must love somebody.

"Yes, but *her!* Any one rather than her! Oh, Rose, I shall never be happy!"

"Don't say that. He has clearly forgotten all about it—treats it as a boyish flirtation. His heart is undeniably yours—happy girl that you are to be able to say so! Would that I could know Julius was mine on the same conditions!"

"Would you accept him?"

"Gladly."

"And the thought of her would not poison your happiness?"

"No."

Violet sighed deeply, and was silent. She tried to persuade herself that she ought not to be affected by the dark and bitter thoughts arising from the discovery of her lover's prior attachment; but instinctively she returned to the subject, to dwell on it with morbid satisfaction.

She passed a wretched night. Broken dreams of Marmaduke at her mother's feet, suddenly changing to dreams of her own marriage, interrupted at the foot of the altar, made her sleep restless. Her waking thoughts were scarcely less irritating. Sometimes she would try to believe that Mrs. Henley might have been misinformed, sometimes that the Mr. Ashley of whom she spoke might have been another Mr. Ashley, and sometimes that it was a mere flirtation which gossip had magnified into an engagement. But these thoughts were chased away by the recollection of various looks interchanged with Marmaduke, when her mother was mentioned, looks which plainly told her that he had discovered the falsehood which was under the little creature's affected sensibility and goodness.

CHAPTER III.

DECLARATION.

Marmaduke persevered for several days in his system of polite indifference toward Mrs. Meredith Vyner, while his attentions to Violet became more and more explicit. Her suspicions were gradually giving way.

One evening they sat in the drawing-room discussing *Norma*, which they had seen the night before; and passing from the singers to the story, Violet remarked what a grand tragic idea it contained.

"Yet I scarcely think," said Mrs. Vyner, "that the story is taken up at its best point. Suppose the author had shown us the early struggles of Norma—her passion gradually consuming religious scruples—would not that have been fine? Then, again, after she loves Pollio, her struggles to conceal from others the crime she has been guilty of; surely there is nothing more fearful than the combat in a woman's breast, when she is hourly striving first to resist a passion, and then to conceal it because she knows its guilt!"

Her eyes were bent upon Marmaduke as she said this, and Violet noticed their strange expression.

"You will accuse me of libeling your sex," said he, laughing, "if I answer as I think."

"Let us hear what ill you think of us," said Rose. "Mr. Wincot will defend us, I am sure; won't you?"

Tom Wincot, who was quietly winning Vyner's money at écarté, answered, as he marked the king—

"You know, Miss Wose, knight-ewantwy is a pwinciple with me; without being womantic I have an exaggewated wespect for the sex,

which makes me cwedulous of all their virtues; so wely on me."

"Oh, I am not going to maintain my opinion at the sword's point," said Marmaduke; "but nevertheless, since you wish to hear it, this it is: women are such capital actresses, that I fancy it would have given Norma very little trouble either to feign or conceal any feeling she pleased."

"Atwocious!—(I pwopose—thwee, if you please)."

"Mr. Ashley's opinion of the sex does not say much for his acquaintance with it," said Violet, with a slight touch of scorn in her tone.

"It does not," he replied; in fact, my early impressions were not calculated to make me gallant."

He looked at Mrs. Vyner as he spoke; she kept her eyes fixed on her embroidery; but Violet noticed her efforts to conceal agitation.

The entrance of Sir Chetsom Chetsom put an end to the discussion. The old beau was more resplendent than ever; and the belief that Hester loved him had really made him look younger. Conversation became frivolous at once, except between Marmaduke and Violet, who were earnestly talking together, too earnestly for Mrs. Vyner's comfort, and, accordingly, she from time to time addressed a question to Marmaduke in the hope of bringing him into the general discourse; but he contented himself with a simple reply, and then resumed what he was saying to Violet.

Jealousy was tormenting Mrs. Vyner, and Marmaduke knew it. He had so studied every look and movement of her, that, actress as she was, she could not easily deceive him; and he felt a strange delight in thus penetrating beneath her mask, and there contemplating the agitated features.

To understand his persistance in the perilous game he was playing, you must endeavor to appreciate the strange, intense, never-ceasing excitement which every scene of the drama afforded him; you must remember that almost every phrase had its interpretation, every trivial act revealed some motive, every look was carefully noted. Of her consummate hypocrisy he was fully aware; but he was also aware that she loved him. How much was love, and how much pretense, he could not tell, and he was always on the alert to discover it; meanwhile, the very doubt was an extra stimulus. Those who, no matter for what purpose, have ever been obliged thus to watch the acts, words, and looks of one whose real motives and feelings it is important they should detect, will be able to understand the excitement of this situation. Marmaduke the more readily indulged in it owing to his peculiar organization, which made excitement a sort of necessary stimulus to him.

That very evening he saw her turning over the leaves of a book, occasionally casting an anxious glance at the contents, which made him aware that she was seeking for some particular passage. At last she seemed to find it. The silk ribbon, which served to mark the place, she moved from where it was before, and with a careless and apparently unintentional action, let it fall at that part of the volume which she then held open. Turning over a few more leaves, she then closed the book, and leaned her arm upon it.

Violet had also noticed this, but in that casual way in which we notice things which have no significance for us at the time, though afterward, when some light is thrown upon them, the memory repeats every detail. This she had *seen* without *observing*. In about ten minutes afterward Mrs. Vyner said—

"By-the-by, Mr. Ashley, were not you to borrow my Petrarch? Here it is for you. Be careful of it, for it is one of my favorite books."

Marmaduke at once guessed there was something in this offer, which did not appear on the face of it; and then recollecting her search for a passage, and the removal of the book-marker, concluded that the passage was meant for him to read.

Violet recollected it also, and rightly guessed the meaning.

Marmaduke took the volume, and placed it on a side table, and then resumed his conversation with Violet.

Her anxiety to get hold of the volume, and read the pages where the book-marker was placed, became so great that she soon ceased to pay any attention to what he said. By way of diverting him from the present position, she proposed that they should sing a duet. He readily accepted, and Rossini's *M'abbraccia Argirio* was at once commenced.

When that was finished, Violet asked him to sing *Io son ricco e tu sei bella* from L'Elisire d'Amore, with Rose, and while they were singing it, she returned to her former place. Then, as if casually, but with an agitated heart, she took up the Petrarch. It opened at the Trionfo della Morte, at that passage where Laura makes the exquisite avowal of her love vailed by reserve; as Violet read these words—

Mai diviso
Da te non fu'l mio cor, nè giammai fia;
Ma temprai la tua fiamma col mio viso.
Perchè a salvar te e me, null' altra via
Era alla nostra giovinetta fama;*

Her breath was suspended, and with a feeling of sick anxiety, she continued to read—

Quante volte diss' io: questi non ama
Anzi arde, onde convien ch' a ciò proveggia.
E mal può proveder chi teme o brama.
Quel di fuor miri, e quel dentro non veggia.†

Her head began to swim; there was no mistaking the significance of the avowal. With an effort she continued—

Più di mille fiate ira dipinse
Il volto mio, ch' amor ardeva il core,
Ma voglia in me ragion giammai non vinse.
Poi se vinto ti vidi dal dolore
Drizzai'n te gli occhi allor soavemente
Salvando la tua vita e'l nostro onore.‡

* "Never was my heart separated from thee, never will it be; but I tempered the ardor of thy passion with the austerity of my look, since there was no other way to save us both."

† "How often have I said to myself, he loves me, nay, he burns for me, and I must avert the danger: let him see my face, but not what passes in my heart!"

‡ "A thousand times and more, anger was painted on my brow, while love flamed in my heart; but never did desire vanquish reason in me. Then, when I saw thee subdued by grief, I softly raised my eyes to thine, thus saving thy life and our honor."

The lights danced before her eyes, her head was dizzy, and had she been alone she must have fainted; but the strong necessity for self-mastery gave her strength.

Marmaduke's clear voice was at that moment giving mock tenderness to the words—

Idol mio non più rigor,
Fa felice un senator.

Tom Wincot was leisurely dealing.

Violet was horribly conscious of her position, and gaining, in that consciousness, energy enough to subdue her emotion, with a trembling hand she replaced the book. As she did so, her eye encountered, for an instant, the piercing gaze of Mrs. Vyner. It was but a look—it lasted but an instant, but in that look what meaning was concentrated!

The duet was finished, and Mrs. Vyner was by Marmaduke's side, complimenting him on his singing, before Violet had recovered from the shock which that look had given her.

What a situation! Not only had she intercepted Mrs. Vyner's unmistakable avowal, but she had been detected by her in the very act. The secret was not only discovered, but it was known to be discovered.

Violet, unable longer to remain in the room, retired quietly to indulge in her intense sorrow by herself.

With a sense of utter desolation she threw herself on a chair, her eyes fixed vacantly on the ground, her hurrying thoughts whirling round one object, restless, agitating, and feverish. She did not cry at first: it was more like stupor than grief; but as her ideas became clearer, they awakened her to anguish, and she wept.

She wept over the hopelessness of her love; she wept over the degradation of her lover. Low sobs burst from her, and the tears which rolled down her cheeks were unchecked.

A touch upon her hand startled her: it was the rough paw of her affectionate Shot, who had been seated by her side, looking sorrowfully in her face, sympathizing with her sorrow: finding himself unheeded, he had lifted his paw, and placed it upon her hand. She smiled mournfully upon him through her tears; he answered her with a plaintive whine, and rising upon his hind legs, thrust his shaggy head caressingly into her hand.

"My poor Shot!" she said, "*you* love me—you are not false!"

He whined again, and thrust his nose into her hand.

But his demonstrations of affection only made her grief the greater—his caressing, whining sympathy only made her more painfully aware of her need for sympathy, and she sank back in a paroxysm of tears which lasted some time. Then rising, she dried her eyes, gulped down her sighs with a strong effort, and said, "I will endure!"

The passion of her grief had passed, and she was calm.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TEMPEST LOWERS.

Immediately on reaching home that night, Marmaduke sat down to read the pages of Petrarch, which had been so significantly marked for him. As he found the passages before quoted, his attention became excessively eager; and having read them with curious emotion, he re-read them with intense care; weighing every line, and interpreting them to the fullest extent.

He let the book fall upon the table, and throwing himself back in his arm-chair, allowed the current of his thoughts to take their flattering course.

No man can receive, unmoved, the avowal of a woman's love; and when that avowal breaks through all prudence, and disdains all ties, the flattery is irresistible. To Marmaduke it had an additional charm: it was the capitulation of an enemy he had almost despaired of conquering. His revenge was at hand!

But now the crisis was so near, his perplexity became tenfold. Now Mrs. Vyner was won, he was condemned to adopt some plan which would both secure his vengeance, yet not lose Violet.

Violet had not been so cold of late. His ideas also became clearer. The agitation of doubt once passed—Mrs. Vyner's declaration having stilled his impatience—his love for Violet resumed its empire. He saw that his vengeance was impossible, if he still thought of her; yet he could not renounce his vengeance. How to attain both objects? He would invent some plan.

He was in anxious doubt. The invention on which he had relied to extricate him when the crisis came, was now powerless. He could think of nothing feasible.

Men who scheme are too apt to be caught in their own nets, from this reckless confidence in their resources. They foresee the danger, but shut their eyes to it. They propose to avoid it by "some plan." But the vagueness of "some" plan has to be changed into the precision of one decided plan, when the time for action arrives; and this must be one adequate to the occasion.

The next day, Violet accompanied Rose on a visit to Fanny Worsley, who was about to be married. The invitation was eagerly accepted by Violet, for home had become hideous since the fatal discovery of Mrs. Vyner's guilty passion. The agonizing struggles she had gone through on becoming fully aware of her own hopeless love, had sorely tried the strength of her soul; for although she could not doubt that Marmaduke loved her, however inexplicable his relations to Mrs. Vyner, yet she at once saw that these must utterly destroy all hope of ever being united to him, even could she so far overcome her own scruples as to accept him. But the masculine strength of mind with which she was endowed saved her from being entirely prostrated by the blow. She rose up against misfortune, looked at it fixedly, though mournfully, in the face, saw its extent, and resigned herself with stoic courage. Suffer she did, and deeply; but she bore it as an irremediable affliction; and thus, by shutting herself from the wearying agitations of fallacious hopes, saved herself from a great source of pain.

Rose had marked the sudden change in her demeanor, and the traces of violent grief in her face; but all her affectionate questions had

been so evidently painful, that she ceased to ask them. The impatience Violet exhibited to be gone, the anxiety to leave home, more and more excited her curiosity; and as the carriage rolled away from the door, and Violet fervently exclaimed "Thank God!" Rose twined an arm round her waist, and said—

"Dearest Violet, tell me what has happened. Something, I know, has. Your wretchedness is too visible. Do tell me."

Violet burst into tears, and throwing her arms round her sister's neck, kept her tightly embraced for some minutes, sobbing fearfully, and kissing her, but making no effort to speak.

"Talk of it, do, dear," said Rose, sobbing with her; "it will comfort you."

Violet only pressed her closer.

"Tell me what it is. Perhaps I shall be able to explain it."

Violet sobbed, and shook her head in despair.

"Dear, dear Violet! Don't give way so. Tell me what it is. It may be only some misunderstanding. It may be cleared up by a word."

Not a word escaped from the wretched girl. Rose wiped away her sister's fast-falling tears, and then wiped her own eyes, and kissed and entreated, but no answer could she get, beyond a sob, a moan, or a violent pressure of the hand.

In this way they rode on for some miles.

Exhausted with weeping, Violet closed her eyes, and dozed awhile upon her sister's shoulder. When she awoke, she was calm again. A deep, unutterable sadness sharpened her pallid features; and, in a low voice, she said—

"Dear Rose, let me beg of you to ask me no questions respecting my grief: it is irreparable, and it can not be mentioned. I shall have strength to bear it—at least I hope so—but not strength to talk of it. Leave me to my own reflections and to time. Let them know at Fanny's that I have been ill, and am not yet recovered; but give no hint of any cause for sorrow."

CHAPTER V.

VACILLATION.

Lady Pliant. O, consider it, what you would have to answer for, if you should provoke me to frailty. Alas! humanity is feeble, and unable to support itself.

WYCHERLEY.—*The Double Dealer.*

When Marmaduke called, he found Mrs. Vyner as polite and as distant as before, with something in her manner which looked like timidity. He had anticipated a very different reception. After the implicit avowal contained in the passage of Petrarch, he anticipated that all coquetry, all reserve, would be cast aside, and that she would throw herself into his arms. How little he understood her!

Irritated by this resumption of her former manner, he at last said—

"Mary, I am not to be trifled with any longer. Tell me once for all—Did you give me that hook, on Monday evening, to make a fool of me; or, did you give it that I might understand you?"

She was knitting a purse, and continued her work without making the slightest observation.

"Mary, take care! take care? I am violent—do not rouse me. I must decide to-day whether I am to be yours or *another's*."

She trembled slightly as he said this, and raised her eyes to his.

"You have played with my affection too long already. To-day must end it. Mary, do you love me?"

She kept her eyes fixed upon his, and smiled.

"I will take no equivocal answer," he said, rising, and approaching her; "if it is to end, it had better end at once."

She shook back her golden tresses, and motioning him to be seated, with a most significant smile, said—"Marmaduke, you need not go."

He sat upon the ground at her feet, and looking up into her face, whispered—

"My own Mary!"

She drooped over him, so as to cover his head with her luxuriant hair, and kissed him on the brow.

His heart swelled with triumph, and his senses were violently agitated.

She also triumphed, as she gazed upon the fierce, impetuous creature whom she had subdued, and who now sat at her feet, his head resting on her lap, passion darting from his lustrous eyes, sitting there her slave and her adorer. A scornful remembrance of the haughty Violet, over whom she now triumphed, gave additional keenness to her delight.

After allowing him to remain some minutes in ecstatic contemplation, she bade him rise.

"Oh, let me still sit here. Here could I spend my life. Here, my own exquisite Mary, at your feet—your strange eyes looking thus into mine, and stirring the fibers of my heart as no eyes ever stirred them."

"Dearest Marmaduke, remember our love is sacred, but it must not make us forget prudence—

Salvando la tua vita e'l nostro onore."

This quotation from the passage in Petrarch at once checked the current of Marmaduke's feelings and made him remember he had a part to play. It quelled the emotions of the scene, and recalled to him that he was but an actor.

He rose, and with well-feigned reluctance entered into her plans for the preservation of her honor and her virtue, without, at the same time affecting their love. They were to love Platonically; they were to imitate Petrarch and Laura in the depth, constancy, and purity of their affection.

"Now," thought he, "for my revenge."

How great his vexation when he found that Violet had left home, and left it for some weeks. He had anticipated an immediate triumph; he thought from vows of Platonic and Petrarchian love to pass at once to his declaration to Violet, so that his engagement to her should come upon Mrs. Vyner like a thunderclap. But now he saw this delayed for weeks; and to one of his impatient temper this was a serious irritation.

The absence of Violet weakened his resolution. He was too susceptible of Mrs. Vyner's personal charms, and too fascinated by her manner, to remain long in her society without

danger. So long as Violet was present, her magnificent beauty and strong character were as spells upon him, which counteracted the more sensual attractions of Mrs. Vyner, and kept him to his meditated plans. But Violet absent, his senses and vanity were laid open to the assaults of the adroit coquette. He became more and more in earnest. His desire for her possession daily encroached upon his desire for vengeance; till at last he began to think only of accomplishing the former.

The reader may condemn him: he will do so; but he should remember that Marmaduke was no paragon of virtue, who could resist the temptations of his senses and his vanity. He belonged, indeed, to that race of human beings on whom, however great the moral qualities, yet, from their highly nervous organizations, temptation comes with tenfold force to what it does on colder-blooded mortals. He had fine qualities; but neither his education nor his organization fitted him for a paragon. He was, indeed, a most imperfect hero: very erring, very human. And, bold and reckless as he was, he pursued the suggestions of his erring nature without regard to consequences: if those suggestions were noble, they led him to heroism; if base, they led him to crime. I state the facts, "nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice;" let those cast the first stone at him, who feel they can do so with a clear conscience.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRIAL.

Sa pensée est un monde son cœur un abîme;
C'est ainsi qu'elle va, forte, de crime en crime
Bravant impunément et la peuple et la cour
Ne méritant que haine et n'aspirant qu'amour!
MAD. EMILE GIRARDIN.—*Cléopatre.*

POOR Meredith Vyner was tormented with jealousy. He had blindly credited his wife, when she told him that she sought to bring about a match between Marmaduke and Violet, and had rivaled her in his attentions to the bold suitor, who was to wed this imperious girl. But from time to time he had felt twinges of jealousy. It seemed to him that Marmaduke was a great deal too attentive to his wife. He dared not make any remark; but he observed it with pain. Now, that Violet was away, and he saw Marmaduke still more assiduous in his visits, saw him daily in the house, and closeted with his wife for hours together, his suspicions began to assume a more galling fixity.

He could not deceive himself respecting the dangerous attractions of his rival. He could not persuade himself that a man of his age had any strong hold of a young woman's affections. Indeed, his wife had recently too often reminded him of the difference of their ages, and made him feel too grateful for the slightest show of affection, for him to doubt the precariousness of his tenure. It was one of the weapons she used against him; she knew its value, and never allowed it to rust. Although, therefore, he adored her, was proud of her, was proud of even the slight degree of love she pretended to feel for him, he began to feel that the degree was but small; and this was, perhaps, the principal cause of his submissive, spaniel-like adoration. Poor human nature!

If, however, the consciousness of the small return which his affection met with, made that affection greater, it also made his jealousy more poignant, and more easily alarmed. He never saw any one pay her the slightest attention without a qualm. He was jealous of old men, he was jealous of young men; he was jealous of fools, he was jealous of wits; he was even jealous of his daughters, because she showed them so much tenderness.

Judge, then, what he must have felt when he began to see clearly into the nature of Marmaduke's attentions! The poor old pedant used to pace up and down his study, sometimes up and down the corridor, while Marmaduke was sitting alone with her in the drawing-room, or in her boudoir; never venturing to enter, lest his anxiety should be legible on his countenance, and counting the minutes till the *tête-à-tête* broke up.

Several times, while she was out in the carriage, did he open her escritoire, of which he had a duplicate key, and hurriedly read all the letters there locked up. But he found nothing that he could construe into an appearance of criminality. The notes from Marmaduke were friendly answers to invitations, for the most part, or trifling communications, in which no word of tenderness, no allusion to secrets, could give him the slightest uneasiness. Marmaduke had been too guarded ever to allow himself a suspicious phrase. Not that he feared Vyner, but because he knew the danger of letters.

These fruitless searches only threw the jealous husband into fresh perplexities, and made him doubt the justice of the suspicions which Marmaduke's manner invariably revived.

Nor was it Marmaduke's attentions which alone alarmed him. His wife's manner was greatly changed. She no longer came into his study that he might read aloud to her for an hour or two in the morning. She no longer interested herself in his Horatian labors. She no longer cajoled him, no longer petted him. She was fretful, capricious, abstracted. She threw his old age more frequently in his face. She began to talk sentimentally about "incompatibilities;" and to declaim about the necessity for "passion." The gay, little, sarcastic, worldly-wise woman changed into a fervent admirer of Petrarch, Byron, and Rousseau.

Symptoms not to be mistaken!

The truth is, Mrs. Vyner, always more in earnest than Marmaduke, had now so completely caught the feeling of the part she had assumed, that from feigning, it had passed into reality. She loved him. She even sighed over her lot in being wedded to another, and reproached herself for having been false to her first love.

What had she gained by her falsehood? Station and wealth; but with it a false and difficult position as step-mother to three girls; and an old, foolish, pedantic husband, whom she mastered, but could not love. And what are wealth and station in comparison with affection?

The amount of the change which had taken place, may be estimated by that one question.

Such being the disposition of the parties, it may seem strange that matters did not speedily come to a crisis. But neither the passion of these guilty lovers, nor the jealousy of the husband forced a crisis; and for this reason:

Marmaduke had early committed a capital mistake; a mistake, I mean, in gallantry. Urged by the impetuosity of his nature, he had endeavored to overcome her resistance by persuading her to be his. Now, a woman yields from excitement, not from persuasion: passion, not argument, is the instrument of her fall. In endeavoring to argue the point with her, he was always at a disadvantage, because his cause was so bad, and he forced her to bring forward good *reasons* for refusal. Having uttered these reasons, she was forced to abide by them, not because they were right, but because she could not so glaringly contradict them by her acts.

To put the case to the reader's experience, I would say, that many a time has he, the reader, been refused a kiss he was fool enough to *ask* for, which he might have had for the taking!

The consequence was, that Mrs. Vyner kept within the programme of Platonic love; and this she managed without exasperating Marmaduke beyond endurance. An adroit woman has a thousand ways of preserving herself, and Mrs. Vyner was exceedingly adroit.

Meanwhile, she indulged in her passion without troubling herself much about consequences. She was content with keeping Marmaduke her slave. The delight that it gave her is indescribable. She was always inventing some new plan to assure herself of it.

One day he was seated with her in the boudoir, which I have not yet described, but which, as the temple where she received her devotees, merits a few words. It was exquisitely fitted up. To throw the proper light upon her blonde beauty, the furniture was of a pale blue; and the curtains, which, in lieu of a door, separated the boudoir from the bed-room, were of blue velvet. The walls were painted: a light, elegant border of arabesque, and a center-piece of flowers on a light-blue ground. A few statuettes, and some recherché knicknacks, were distributed with art about the room.

Dressed in a light peignoir, the deep rich lace trimmings of which only half concealed her dazzling bosom, she looked a most seductive syren in this retreat, and it is no wonder that Marmaduke's senses were captivated.

On that day, she was fretful. Never had he known her so exasperated against her husband, and against the wretched bondage in which she was held as wife to a man she could not love. To hear her talking about "incompatibilities," and the "degradation" of being linked to one man, while her heart was another's you would have supposed she had been forced into the match, had been sold by some mercenary parent. From time to time, she would throw up her eyes and sighing, exclaim—

"No escape! to think there is no escape!"

Marmaduke could not comprehend this. He understood clearly enough that she never had loved Vyner; but why these bitter complaints at this moment?

The truth is, she was about to make a great, a wanton experiment of her power over him; she wished to see how far his passion had made him her blind or willing instrument; and she suddenly interrupted an eloquent speech of his by—

"Of what use is protestation? You say you love me. You say that you would move heaven and earth to gain me; yet you *do* nothing: it is all talk."

"Do! What can I do?"

"Is it for *me* to tell you?" she said, scornfully.

He looked at her wonderingly; but she had resumed her work, and was silent.

"Abuse me for my stupidity," he said; "for, upon my word, I do not understand you."

She shrugged her shoulders contemptuously.

"Will you not tell me?" he asked.

She took a skein of silk, and said—

"Hold this while I wind it."

She fixed the skein on his hands, and began calmly winding, as if nothing whatever had been said. He waited a few moments expecting her to speak, but she gave no signs of intending to pursue the subject.

"Why will you not tell me what is in your thoughts at this moment?" he said.

"Contempt."

"For what?"

"For mere talkers."

"If you mean me, the contempt is undeserved. Tell me what it is that can be done, and it shall be done."

She continued to wind the silk, but refused to answer.

"Mary, dear Mary, tell me what you mean."

She kept her eyes bent down, and said—

"Can you not guess?"

"I can not."

She was again silent. The silk was all wound.

"What is it? For God's sake, speak!"

"There is an obstacle to our happiness—is there not?"

"There is."

"And but one?"

"But one."

She raised her head a little, so as to look him full in the face, and then closing her eyes, in the way peculiar to her, suddenly flashed them upon him. In that instant he divined the diabolical thought which was in her mind, but which she did not dare to utter; he felt a sickening disgust steal over him, as the idea rushed hideously into his soul.

There was a breathless pause. He mastered his emotion as well as he could, and determined to have no possible uncertainty on the subject, but to make her avow it in all its explicitness. Collecting himself, therefore, he whispered—

"*That obstacle must be removed.*"

A strange expression stole over her eyes, as she heard this, and said—

"Have you the courage?"

He could scarcely falter out—

"I have!"

Her point was gained. She no more meant

her horrible suggestion to be realized, than he meant to realize it. They were both trying each other. She, to see the extent of her power; he, to ascertain the truth of his suspicions.

Imagining her power great enough to lead him into any crime, she burst out laughing.

"And do you mean to say you thought me serious, Marmaduke?"

"I did."

"Then what a villain you must be!"

"I am only your slave."

She shook her head at him, and said—

"Slaves should not listen to such thoughts. If I thought you were serious, I should loathe you."

"And I should loathe myself," he said, coldly.

It so happened that both believed the other guilty of the serious intention, and attributed the disavowal to fear of having been understood. Marmaduke had noticed the affected tone of her laughter; it was affected, but not from the cause he imagined: it arose from a sense of uneasiness at having pushed the experiment too far, and from a dread of his really believing her to be serious.

On the other hand, she noticed the faltering hesitation and coldness of his tone, which she interpreted into the uneasiness of guilt, but which really arose from the intense loathing he felt for her. It only seemed a confirmation of her power.

Nothing could ever have persuaded Marmaduke that Mrs. Vyner was innocent of the thoughts he attributed to her; and his loathing was so great, that it not only completely crushed the sort of love he had felt for her, but revived his desire for vengeance, which he thought could not be made terrible enough to fitly punish such a wretch.

He dissembled his disgust, and only more urgently pleaded her to elope with him. At the conclusion of one of his speeches to that effect, he noticed that she seemed not to attend to him, but to be eagerly listening. Presently she put her finger upon her lips by way of caution, and then, in a voice she strove to make calm and distinct, said—.

"Marmaduke, I do not doubt your love, but I must not, will not listen to it. I am married. I never can forget that; do not you! If a sisterly regard will suffice you, that will I give; but you must here engage to think of me as a brother, and, above all, never again to let me hear from your lips the language I have heard to-day. Will you promise me?"

She nodded significantly to him to reply in the affirmative, and he said—

"Will you, then, give me no hope?"

"None. You have heard my conditions. Do you accept them?"

"If I must."

"You must."

"Then I do."

"That's right. Now go home."

She put her finger again upon her lips, and motioned him to listen.

The gentle creak of retiring footsteps stealing away was then distinctly heard. As they ceased, she said—

That was my husband. He has overheard us. But fortunately he heard nothing which I can not explain. Leave him to me."

Marmaduke went home in a state of fever, torn by the most vehement emotions, and seeing all darkly before him.

CHAPTER VII.

FATHER AND CHILD.

Meredith Vyner stole back to his study, after having overheard a portion of the foregoing scene, like one who has just received a sentence of death. He loved his wife with the unreasoning idolatry of one who has centered all his affections on a single object. His children had been gradually estranged from him, his wife had taken their place in his heart, and now she was listening to the vows of another!

What he had heard was enough to make him fear the worst. Her refusal to listen to Marmaduke, and her offer of a purely sisterly regard, although it assured him that at present she was resolved not to forget her duty, gave him no assurance that such prudence would long continue. Could she restrict herself to that sisterly love? Could she know that one so young, so handsome, so imposing, loved her, and not at last yield to his love?

He would snatch her from the danger by taking her at once from London. Away from her lover, she might forget him, or he might seek another. It was necessary to take a decided step.

When Mrs. Vyner came into his study, he at once assumed an unusual tone of command, and informed her that it was his pleasure they should at once return to the country.

"My dear Meredith, what are you thinking of? The country! We can not leave town in the height of the season."

"I have my reasons," he said, with as much dignity as he could assume.

"And I have mine for not going."

"But I insist upon it."

She seated herself in one of the easy-chairs, and said, quietly—

"You will not insist when you have heard me. This very morning, Mr. Ashley has made a foolish declaration of love to me."

He was thunderstruck. The quiet matter-of-fact style in which she communicated this intelligence, was indeed a masterpiece of adroitness. There are moments in our lives when audacity is prudence; and this was one, when nothing but an audacious avowal could, by anticipating, defeat the accusation she knew he would bring forward. She lost nothing by avowing it, as she was certain he already knew it; but, on the other hand, by anticipating him, she was enabled to give her own coloring to the appearances which condemned her.

"I see your surprise," she added; "you little expected it, nor did I. You thought he was attached to Violet; I thought so too; and as I am sure Violet is attached to him, I have set my mind upon the match. But now, look here: I received his declaration without anger and without encouragement. I told him I would love him as a sister, and made him promise,

on pain of instantly refusing to see him, to cease all such language, and to crush all such hopes. Did I act rightly?"

"Yes—very—very."

"But, suppose I run away into the country, what will he imagine? That I am afraid of him, afraid of myself; that I love him, and avoid him. Do you wish him to think *that*? You do not. Then we remain."

"But—and you—will you continue to see him?"

"Why not? If I am to avoid him let it be done at once. If not, let us treat him as if he had never made that silly declaration. He will soon get over this. It is only a passing fancy. He saw me a mere girl, wedded to one old enough to be my father, and imagined, as all men would imagine, that I should be easily persuaded to forget what was due to my husband, and to myself. I have undeceived him. My coldness and firmness will soon cure him. He will then think of Violet."

She ceased. He took vast pinches of snuff, in an agitated, absent manner, but made no remark. She perceived that she had gained the day, and left him to his reflections.

Bitter enough those reflections were. The explicit avowal had staggered him—had taken from him the very weapon he was to use; but it had in no way alleviated his jealous anguish. He could not answer her—yet could not satisfy himself. The reference she had made to his age still rung in his ears, and told him plainly that his rival would one day be happy.

That afternoon Violet and Rose returned. He received them with unwonted tenderness, for his heart ever yearned to those whom he had excluded from it, and he felt bitter remorse for having sacrificed them to his wife. Violet was peculiarly dear to him at this moment. He felt for her misplaced attachment, and remembered how ill she had been treated at home. He folded her to his breast, with a lovingness which brought the tears into her eyes, and as she sat down on his knee, one arm around his neck, delighted with this change in his manner, she divined at once the real cause of the change. As it was Mrs. Vyner who had estranged him from her, so must it be Mrs. Vyner who had brought back his love.

It was a touching sight to see this parent and child united by a common sorrow, mutually pitying and mutually comforting each other, having in one embrace forgotten all that had once been distrust and coldness, and now possessed by that overflowing love which, in its exaggeration, desires to atone for past coldness.

It was not what they said; for few words passed between them; it was their eloquent looks, significant pressure of hands, convulsive embraces, and tones pregnant with meaning. The father mutely demanded forgiveness, and the child demanded a continuance of love.

After an hour of this intense emotion they grew calmer, and began to talk of indifferent things. From time to time they hovered about the name of Marmaduke, and betrayed, in their very recurrence to the subject, and hesitation in speaking openly of it, how predominant it was in their minds. At last they ventured on the name. It is impossible to convey an idea of the conversation which ensued, because it was conducted in phrases of the most guarded vagueness, but made full of meaning by the looks which accompanied them. Slowly, but irresistibly, the conviction came upon her, that her father had discovered his wife's guilty passion; or, at least, *suspected* it. Her object, therefore, was, if possible, to persuade him that Marmaduke came there for herself; and she even went so far as to laugh faintly at his efforts to make himself agreeable to Mrs. Vyner, by way of using a step-mother's influence in his favor.

Her voice shook, as she uttered this heroic falsehood.

He gazed at her with mournfulness; a tear rolled down his cheek; his heart swelled as he sobbed out—

"My poor child! my poor child!"

He dared not undeceive her, dared not tell her what he knew.

She saw that she was not believed, but little did she know the mournful pity with which her supposed credulity filled him.

It was a relief to her when the dinner-bell rang, and put an end to their interview.

He saw her depart, and sat sighing deeply, wholly bewildered at the inextricable difficulties of his position; and when Mrs. Vyner came in, and chatted away about the opera, to which they were going that night, as if nothing whatever had occurred, he almost felt as if he had just awakened from a dream-troubled sleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CRISIS.

Quelle nouvelle a frappé mon oreille,
Quel feu mal étouffé dans mon cœur se réveille!
Quel coup de foudre ô ciel! et quel funeste avis!

RACINE.—*Phèdre.*

False! I defy you both:
I have endured you with an ear of fire;
Your tongues have struck hot irons on my face.

CYRIL TOURNEUR.—*The Revenger's Tragedy.*

THERE was an appalling struggle in Marmaduke's breast that day as he reached home. The terrible scene which had passed between him and Mrs. Vyner, with its plainly expressed hint at assassination, made him shudder as he again and again went over it in memory. False and heartless he had known her; but for *this* he had not been prepared. And he felt a sort of sickness come over him as he reflected on the peril which he had escaped, in Vyner's not coming to listen at the very moment when she had proposed, and he had affected to accept the proposition! He would then have been accused of having really meant to perpetrate the crime; for who would have credited his disavowal? Who would have credited his assurance that he was but feigning what his soul abhorred?

By a retrospective glance at his own conduct, and at the peril he had escaped, he was led to meditate on the nature of this woman; and by a reflection on her criminal thoughts, he was shown the criminality of his own.

This revenge which he had planned so remorselessly what was it but a crime? If he had been wronged by a heartless woman, was it for him thus to measure out the punishment? and did her jilting him deserve so terrible a retribution?

After all, was not vengeance a "wild justice," but only the justice of savages? Was it worthy of civilized, christianized man? And for a man to wreak it on a woman, was not that petty, ignoble, more like spite than retribution?

Such were the thoughts which possessed him. That they never suggested themselves before, arises from the fact of his never having before been cool enough to question the legitimacy of his feelings. But now they staggered him; now they came upon him like a remorse; and he *relinquished his scheme of vengeance!*

The next day, impelled by some strange impulse which he could not explain, he went to the Vyners. Violet observed the agitation of his manner, and attributed it to meeting her again, after what had evidently transpired during her absence. She was therefore considerably surprised when he begged for a few moments' private conversation with her, at the same time entreating Rose to leave them alone. She had intended to refuse the request, but Rose had departed before she could open her lips. Rose too well understood the purport of that interview, not to be anxious to forward it by her absence.

"Mr. Ashley," said Violet, coldly, "there is no subject upon which I can hear you alone; you will oblige me, therefore, by suffering me to follow my sister."

"Violet!"

"Mr. Ashley, by whose authority do you address me in that manner?"

"The authority of my love. Violet, I love you—you know it—but I must tell you so—I must—"

She moved toward the door; he intercepted her, and put his back against it. Drawing herself up to her full height, with a haughty gesture she motioned him to let her pass.

"I did not expect *this*," he said, without moving; "I thought I should, at least, be heard. Miss Vyner had given me reason to hope that she would at least suffer me to tell her— Violet, I can not control myself. You *must* know, you must long have known I loved you, you must have seen it in every—"

"Mr. Ashley, I request to be allowed to leave the room."

"Do you refuse to listen to me?"

"I do."

He stared at her bewildered; there was something so calm and collected in her manner, yet the manner was so incomprehensible, that he was speechless for a few moments.

"You can not—can not have mistaken—for so many months—do you mean that you mistook my looks—my words—my actions? Did you!"

"I did not."

"Good God! have you then been playing with me?"

"Playing!" she repeated scornfully, yet sadly. "I play!"

"Then what can all this mean? There is some delusion—a word may set it right. You knew I loved you—did you not? You hear it now. Violet, I love you—love you as man never loved before. Will you accept that love?"

"Dare you ask me?" she said, fixing her large eyes on his with searching keenness.

"Violet—what is it you doubt?"

"Your purpose."

"My purpose is, to tell you that my heart is yours—that I live but in the hope of calling you mine."

Her bosom heaved, her nostrils dilated, and with flashing eyes she proudly, almost fiercely, exclaimed—

"Let me pass!"

"What *is* the meaning of this?"

"Let me pass, sir!"

"Violet! are you mad, or do you think me so? Is my love an insult, that—"

"It *is* an insult—a deep insult. Now, sir, will you let me pass?"

"I *will* know what is at the bottom of all this. You may reject me, but you *shall* explain. It is so utterly inconceivable that, after the encouragement you have given me, you should pretend to regard my avowal as an insult, that I demand an explanation."

In spite of the rising passion in his breast, he uttered this so collectedly and so earnestly, that Violet was somewhat perplexed, and began almost to doubt her own conclusions.

"Mr. Ashley," she said, "a short while ago, such an avowal could only have been felt by me as an honor; but since that, your own conscience will tell you why I reject, and reject with deep scorn, the offer of your hand. Pray let me say no more."

His conscience did tell him; at least it suggested what the cause most probably was; but wishing to come to an explanation, he said—

"My conscience tells me that I love you—only you; will you tell me wherein lies the insult?"

A long struggle ensued in her mind; she could not give him the explanation he demanded, because unable to bring herself to mention her step-mother.

"If you persist," she said at last, "I must persist also. I tell you again, the offer of your love to me—here, in this house, is an outrage, and scorn is my only answer. Does that suffice. Would you have me add more bitterness to my refusal?"

"Violet, I can not quit you without— Tell me, is there not *that* in your mind which you shrink from uttering, and which has reference to *some one* in this house?"

"You understand me, then?"

"I do."

"Then let me pass at once."

"Not until you have heard me. Will you hear me—will you, in this solemn moment, let me lay before you the whole history of my heart? You think me a villain; will you listen before you condemn?"

"I know not what plausible excuses—"

"Truth—the simplest truth—shall be my defense. If that condemns me, I will submit in patience. Will you hear me?"

There was something so solemn and so touching in his tone, that Violet was deeply affected by it; the sad earnestness of his voice pleaded eloquently in his favor.

He approached, and took her hand; she withdrew it hastily, and moved toward the mantlepiece, against which she leaned in an attitude of exquisite dignity, turning her face toward him, prepared to listen. After gazing steadfastly at

her for a few seconds, while he collected his thoughts, he thus spoke—

"Violet, I am about to make a most painful avowal; one that will startle you; one that will seem wholly inexplicable. When but a boy, I loved—loved, as boys love, unreasoningly and ardently. I have tropical blood in my veins, Violet, and all passions become intense with me. The girl I loved returned my affection. We were to have been married. I was called away from England. I returned to my father in Brazil. My father gave his consent to our marriage. I wrote to inform her of it; she was overjoyed. Her letters were as ardent as even I could wish. Suddenly they ceased. My father died. I was settling his affairs, and preparing to quit Brazil for England, when I learned from a newspaper that my affianced wife had married another."

He paused; a choking sensation in his throat impeded utterance. Violet had listened eagerly, and still kept her eyes fixed upon him.

"I can not tell you," he resumed, "what I suffered on awakening from the sort of stupor in which this intelligence threw me. You have never known—may God preserve you from ever knowing it!—what that desolation is, when those we love are found unworthy of our love! The anguish and despair which then tore my soul to pieces, I shudder to look back upon. It was not that my love had been destroyed—it was not *that* which made the pang; it was the horrible, heartless cruelty with which I had been deceived. I had been sacrificed to wealth. That I might have forgiven; but it was done so cruelly! Until she had accepted her husband, her letters were as affectionate and hopeful as ever. The blow was unbroken in its fall—no wonder that it nearly crushed me!"

He paused again; and saw tears glisten in the earnest eyes of his listener. She, too, had known what it was to suffer from hopeless love!

"Violet, I am fierce and brutal in my instincts, and my education had been but indifferent; on one point especially it had been deficient—in the Christian spirit of forgiveness. Vengeance—the justice of the savage—was what I had never learned to disown. Writhing under the torture which had been inflicted, I took comfort solely in the hope of vengeance. I came to England with that one absorbing object. Now comes the painful part of my disclosure—if indeed you have not already guessed it—the girl who had— In a word, it was Mrs. Vyner!"

He expected to see her vehemently startled, but she only whispered, in a hoarse and broken voice—

"I knew it."

"You knew it! Then have you understood me?"

"Not quite."

"I must explain, then, my conduct further. I was here in England, resolved on reparation of the wrong I had suffered. I knew not what shape my vengeance would take, but I was resolved to have it in some shape or other. I saw you. To know you, was to love you—and I loved. In my love, I forgot my misery, and ceased to think of revenge. You were sometimes cold and haughty to me, Violet; sometimes kind and encouraging. Do you remember when we rode to the sands that afternoon, and sat upon the rock together listening to the sea? I could have told you then how much I loved you, had not your coldness chilled me. Well, on that very day, while I was suffering from your indifference; *she*, jealous of you, chose to recall me back again to my schemes, by pretending that her marriage had been an act of jealous despair; *she* roused the demon in me by her infernal arts, and once more I resolved to wreak upon her the vengeance you had made me forget. From that moment I have pursued a scheme which involved her ruin. Many times have I been vacillating, many times has a kind word or look from you brought me back again to a purer atmosphere; but *the devil would have it!* and a haughty gesture from you has thrown me back again. Hurried onward by the irresistible course of events, I was nearly losing myself forever, when last night I had my eyes opened. I saw that the only vengeance worthy of a man was *contempt*. At once I resolved to cease feigning love for the miserable being whom I had marked as my victim; resolved to break away from the net in which I was entangled, by quitting England.

Before I left England, I had only to learn my fate: if you refused me, I should carry my despair into distant lands; if you accepted the offer of a heart, I thought you would not refuse to quit England with me. You have now heard all. I have told you of my crime: if repentance will not clear me from the stain—"

The door was thrown violently open before he could conclude the sentence, and Mrs. Vyner stood before them.

They started as at an apparition.

Fearful indeed was the aspect of the little fury, as with bloodshot eyes, quivering lips, and spasm-contracted face, she trembled before them. All that was diabolical in her nature seemed roused, and looking from her eyes: passion made her hideous.

"Your little history is incomplete," she said, in a hissing tone; her voice lowered by the intensity of her feeling; "there is a chapter to be added, which you will allow me to add. Miss Vyner is so excellent a listener that she will not refuse to hear it."

Violet looked haughtily down upon her, and said—

"I desire to hear no more."

"But you must hear this; it concerns you. You can not be indifferent to any thing which relates to your honorable lover; you can not be unwilling to know that he who offers you his hand is vain fool enough to be the dupe of any woman, as he has been *mine*. He has told you, and how prettily he told it! what pathos! what romance! he told you how I played with him. That is true. He was such a vain, silly creature that no one could resist the temptation. Not only did I make a fool of him as a girl, I have done so as a married woman. I persuaded him that even respect for my husband, respect for the world could not withstand the all-conquering beauty of his lumpish person, and he believed it! believed that his face was a charm no woman could

resist. This besotted vanity brought him to my feet; yes, even at the time you were sighing for him, he was at my feet, ardent, submissive, a plaything for my caprice!"

She saw Violet writhing, and her savage heart exulted in the pain she was inflicting; she saw Marmaduke's calm contempt, and her exasperation deepened at the unavailingness of her sarcasms to wound him.

Turning from her, as from one unworthy of notice, he said to Violet—

"I repeat, my fate is in your hands. I love you—love you as I never loved before—with my whole soul: love you with deep reverence for all that is so great and noble in you, and to that generous and exalted mind I leave my errors to be judged."

The sarcasm implied in this avowal almost maddened Mrs. Vyner.

"Accept him, Miss Vyner," she said, with a short, hollow, and hysterical laugh; "pray put him out of his misery; accept the offering of his deep reverence, for that offering is *my leavings!*"

Marmaduke and Violet both started as this poisoned sarcasm issued from her lips, and their faces told her plainly she had struck deep.

"A reformed rake, you know, makes the best husband," she pursued; "so that one so inflammable as *he* is, will be sure to make a constant and adoring husband. You will be *so* happy with him! Whenever conversation grows dull, he can amuse you with narrating little episodes of his love for me, and my *cruelty:* that will be so pleasant! you will never tire of that! Accept him: you will be sure never to repent it!"

Marmaduke could have strangled her.

Violet, seeing clearly the purpose of these horrible phrases, cut them short by saying—

"Mr. Ashley, on some better occasion we will speak again of this; do not let the present ignoble scene continue."

She held out her hand to him. He pressed it to his lips. Mrs. Vyner nearly shrieked with mad jealousy; but suppressed the explosion of her agony; while Violet swept out of the room, disdaining to give even a passing glance at her.

Mrs. Vyner sank exhausted into a chair. Her brain was as if on fire, and her whole frame shook violently with the unutterable rage, jealousy, and hate which stormed within her heart.

Marmaduke could not, in his fiercest moments, have desired a more terrible retribution than that which now had fallen on the miserable woman; and he gazed upon her with a pity which astonished himself. To this he had brought her; unwittingly, it is true, but he felt it was he who had moved the stone which had fallen and crushed her; and now that she lay there suffering before him, his anger had gone, and pity filled its place.

She expected him to speak; she saw his fixed gaze, and endeavored to interpret it; but he spoke not. Before she was aware of his intention, he had left the room.

Five minutes afterward, Meredith Vyner found her apparently lifeless on the floor: she had swooned.

BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

THE IDLER'S DAY.

"Nature hath given us legs to go to our objects, not wings to fly to them."—*Eastward Ho.*

The spring of 1841 was very mild, and this enabled Cecil and Blanche to endure the wretched, comfortless state of Mrs. Tring's boarding-house, better than if the weather had been more rigorous. The cheapness, which was now becoming more and more important to them, was therefore a sufficient compensation for the want of comfort. They had renewed their engagement, hoping that either the comic opera or the historical picture would so improve their circumstances as to admit of their removal in the summer.

They had long awakened from their holiday dream to find that, however pleasant the change in their position, it was only pleasant *as* a change; the novelty once worn off, the scene appeared in all its ugliness, or rather, let me say, appeared so to Cecil. He was of a luxurious habit, and felt privation keenly. Blanche felt it less, and her love for him made home happy. She had never been so happy. Cecil was all she could desire.

As may be imagined, Cecil, once relaxing in the energy with which he had begun to work, never recovered his former happiness. The charms of society were charms he could not withstand; the more so because he was fitted for it—shone in it. Having dined occasionally at the club was sufficient to give him an incurable disgust to the meager fare Mrs. Tring spread before him, and he consequently began to absent himself more and more.

Added to this, his painting proceeded slowly. "Inspiration," wait for it as he would, seemed unwilling to descend upon him. Then there were so many days lost: sometimes the weather was foggy, and that prevented him; sometimes it was fine, and tempted him to exercise; sometimes he had visits to pay; sometimes men "looked in" upon him at his rooms. One way or another, the week slipped from him without leaving behind it any record of labor.

Besides—and this, perhaps, was one great cause of his idleness, giving strength to the other influences—he grew less satisfied with his picture the nearer it approached its termination. Cecil was a man whose designs were always finer than his productions—his sketches gave a promise which his execution never realized. In this little trait we may see the whole man. It might serve as a description of his character. With a certain freshness, delicacy, and even grandeur in his conceptions, he wanted

strength, energy, and mastery to endow them with vitality. Who can wonder that he raved about "genius," and scorned the "mechanical labor" of mere technical execution?

When he contemplated his productions, he grew impatient at their inadequacy to represent his conceptions, and he threw the blame on every thing but on his own indolence and caprice. That broad line which separates *intention* from *execution*—which makes the *thought* a *thing*—which distinguishes the artist from other men, by creating in art what other men only create in visions—that broad line Cecil willfully overlooked. He saw that he had failed, and did not choose to see wherein lay his failure. He despised the "drudgery" which was indispensable to success. Disgusted with his failure, he lost all courage, and scarcely ever handled a pencil.

"When will your picture be finished, Mr. Chamberlayne?" asked Mrs. Merryweather, one morning at breakfast.

"Indeed, I can not say," he replied; "works of that magnitude require long consideration. I could have produced it long ago, had I been disposed; but I'm in no hurry."

"Do you know Mr. Bostock's paintings?"

Cecil replied that he did not.

"Oh, he's a beautiful painter—that he is! Does peaches and mackerel so that you wouldn't know them from real. His pictures give one an appetite—that they do. I remember once—it was very curious—Mrs. Henley, a relation of mine who lives at Southampton—her husband was in the customs—good situation, as I have heard—and a strange creature he was, with the queerest nose you ever saw, and eyes just like a lobster's, one was always alarmed lest they should tumble into his waistcoat pocket! Well, he married my relation, Mrs. Henley, one of the best creatures! She often comes up to town, and I should *so* like you to be acquainted with her—you'll be quite pleased with her! So, as I was saying, she came up to town once, to manage a little business, and enjoy herself at the same time. Well, one day she called upon us. Merryweather—my poor Merryweather—was then alive: who wouldn't have thought him good for another thirty years, at least! He proposed to take us both to the Exhibition; so we went. It was a very hot day, I remember—intensely hot; poor Merryweather was in a bath all the time. And as he stood in the octagon room, his hat in his hand, wiping the perspiration from his face—which was a sight of itself to see!—complaining of heat, I suddenly spied one of Mr. Bostock's pretty pictures—oh, it was a love! you can't fancy what a bunch of grapes straddled across a few peaches surrounded with egg plums! 'Lor,' says poor Merryweather, 'do look at that; isn't it *refreshing?*' And we all declared it was; and *so it was.*"

Cecil, as usual, made a precipitate retreat at the conclusion of this biographical anecdote, and Blanche soon followed him.

"By George!" he said, puffing a huge column of smoke from his mouth, "that woman is insupportable. I really must quit this hole; at least if that toad squats in it."

"She amuses me," said Blanche.

"Lucky for you."

Blanche took up her work, and sat beside her husband, who, stretched upon the sofa, a cigar in his mouth, was at what he chose to consider his morning meditations. He certainly did think; but thought of the club, of society, of opera singers, and of his past life, far more than he thought of his work. From time to time he spoke to Blanche, and the subjects upon which he spoke were sufficiently trivial to have told any one more clear-sighted than she was, how little art occupied his reveries.

His cigar finished, he put on a pair of white kid gloves, and occupied himself for half an hour cleaning them with india-rubber, whistling, humming, and chatting all the while with enviable *insouciance.*

That important business concluded, he rose, kissed his wife, yawned, stretched his limbs, looked out of the window, and then took up his *bottes vernies*, which he began to rub up, and brighten with a piece of wool dipped in oil, whistling, humming, and chatting as before.

"What time is it, I wonder?" he said, drawing out his watch, "nearly twelve! whew! how the morning flies. I must be off. Where's my coat, Pet?"

She gave him his coat, and in another half hour he had completed his toilet, and was ready to start.

"God bless you, my Pet!" he said, embracing her.

"Shall you be home to dinner to-day, dearest?"

"No, I am to dine with Lufton; and this evening we go to Miss Mason's."

"Enjoy yourself! God bless you, dearest!"

Another kiss, and our man of genius departed for his studio. Arrived there, he began to consider whether it were not too late to do any thing that day. It was near one o'clock; at two, Frank was to call upon him. They were going to a morning concert.

"It is decidedly useless beginning any thing to-day. I'll just try over some of those songs till Frank calls."

He sat down to the piano. Having sung for a quarter of an hour, he opened a French novel, and was deep in that when his *fidus Achates* appeared.

"Frank," said Cecil, as they strolled out together, "I am going to ask you a question which generally disturbs friendship, but which won't alter ours, because you'll answer it candidly."

"Cis, I know what that exordium means. Whenever a man begins in that solemn circumlocutory manner he can have but one object—money."

Cecil laughed, as he replied—

"You have hit it, by George!"

"Of course, I have. Do you think I have borrowed so much money without learning every symptom?"

"Well, then, Frank, without disguise, I want to borrow a few pounds; old Vyner has not relented, and his wife has not been lately with any little contribution: but she can't be long; it has been due some weeks."

"What has been due, old fellow?"

"Why, what she intends to give us."

Thus securely did Cecil rely upon that source of aid.

"Meanwhile," he added, "I am deucedly hard up, and if you have a few pounds—"

"Make it shillings, Cis, and it will be quite as impossible. Egad! it is rather a queer sensation for one who has been so long a borrower, to be looked upon in the light of a *possible* lender!"

"Say no more, Frank; you would do it if you could, I am sure."

"Damn my whiskers! if *you* are sure of it, *I'm* not. I doubt whether I *could* lend. I don't know the trick of it; I should feel as strange and disreputable as if I were to pay a bill. Perhaps my friendship for you might overcome that — I don't know — perhaps it might. But it is all speculation, so let us trouble ourselves no more with it. As a matter of practice, judge how feasible it is, when I reveal to you the present state of my capital: four shillings and some half-pence in current coin, and eighteen pence *invested*."

"Invested, Frank! in what, pray?"

"In a bill-stamp: I take care to be provided with *that*."

"Cecil shouted with laughter, exclaiming, "That's so like you."

It was, indeed, a trait which painted the man. The value of the bill-stamp consisted, of course, in the chance of meeting with some obliging young gentleman who would consent, "merely as a matter of form," to put his name to the bill, which Frank would forget to take up. But this value was now the more precarious, as that mere matter of form had been so very frequently gone through, that he found it excessively difficult to get it renewed. As he used to say—

"We degenerate—damn my whiskers! we degenerate fearfully: the principles of true *politeness* are becoming effaced."

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER LITERARY SOIRÉE.

The soirée at Hester Mason's, to which they went that evening, was very much the same as the one formerly described; there were fewer guests, and among them more women: a sure sign that she was getting on in the world, and that the reputation of her parties was beginning to cover any suspicious circumstances in her own position.

But the women were still of a questionable class: questionable, I mean, not as regards propriety, but *ton*. There were no ladies who gave parties, who were recognized as belonging to "society;" and, above all, there were no girls there; the virgins were old, ugly, or wise.

In a word, the women were almost exclusively literary women; described by Cecil as poor faded creatures, who toiled in the British Museum, over antiquated rubbish which they extracted and incorporated with worse rubbish of their own—women who wrote about the regeneration of their sex—who driveled in religious tales—compiled inaccurate histories—wrote moral stories for the young, or unreadable verses for the old—translated from French and German (with the assistance of a dictionary, and a dashing contempt for English idiom) —learned women, strong-minded women, religious women, historical women, and poetical women; there were types of each class, and by no means attractive types.

One remark Cecil made, which every one will confirm. "How curious it is," said he, "to notice the intimate connection between genius and hair. You see it very often in men, but universally in women, that the distinguishing mark of artistic or literary pretension is not in the costume, but in the mode of arranging the hair. Women dress their hair in a variety of ways: each has a reference to what is becoming; but when women set up for genius or learning, all known fashions are despised, and some outrageous singularity alone contents them. Just look round this room. There is Hester herself: she is young and handsome; but instead of taking advantage of her black curls, she trains them up like a modern Frenchman. If you only saw her head, you would call it a boy's. Then, again, next to her sits Mrs. James Murch — she reads Greek, and writes verses; you see it by the hair parted on one side, instead of in the center, and by the single curl plastered on her brow, emulous of a butcher boy. There is Miss Stoking—she writes history, and talks about the 'Chronicles' —I see that in the row of flat curls on her forehead, and in the adjustment of her back hair. Mrs. Fuller must be a philosophical woman, by the way in which all the hair is dragged off her forehead. That bony thing next to her must be a poetess, by the audacity of her crop. In fact, depend upon it, as there is a science of phrenology, there is a science of hair."

These women did not, as may be guessed, give any additional charm to Hester's parties, unless, indeed, in the shape of some fun. Nevertheless, their presence was inexpressibly delightful to her, for it was a sanction; and with all her sneers at the "conventions" of society, Hester was most anxious to preserve them.

Cecil, who liked Hester very much, and was interested even in her opinions, which he did not share, was pitiless in his satire upon her female friends; which I will not repeat here, lest the reader should imagine that *I* share the general dislike to clever women—a conclusion against which I protest, and stoutly. True, I am not so blind an admirer of cleverness as to think it atones for the absence of womanly grace, gentleness, lovingness, and liveliness; but, on the other hand, some of the most charming women—and *womanly* women, too—I have ever known, have been distinguished in literature and art. Will that avowal save me?

Hester forgave Cecil for his opinion, the more so, as she shared it; and although she combated his views on social matters as warmly as ever, was falling over head and ears in love with him.

"You will come round to my way of thinking one day," she said; "so elevated a mind as yours can not long remain a slave to traditionary sophisms; the spirit of the age will claim you."

"Pray," said Cecil, smiling, "can you explain to me what this spirit of the age actually is? I hear a great deal about it, and comprehend nothing that I hear. Is our age so very

different from all those that have gone before it?"

"Assuredly: it is the age of progress."

"Progress? but *that* is the characteristic of all ages; society never stands still."

"True, but sometimes it retrogrades, and now it advances. My dear Mr. Chamberlayne, you will not deny that the peculiarity of our age is not only progress, but consciousness of progress."

"That is to say, I suppose, while our forefathers contented themselves with advancing, we prate about our advance. Now of that kind of consciousness I am as decided an enemy as Carlyle himself; and his eloquent denunciations of it as the disease of our time find full acceptance from me."

"Ah! my dear sir, Carlyle, with all his genius, does not understand the historic development of humanity."

"Perhaps not; nor do I: though I have tried. But it still seems to me an evil, not a benefit, that our modern reformers are so very conscious—"

"Stop! You will not deny that every man should have a purpose?"

Cecil, who knew this was one of the magnificent aphorisms of the "earnest" school, paused for a reply. Seeing him hesitate, Mr. Jukes, a sickly red-haired republican, with a feeble falsetto voice, stammered forth—

"Is it p-p-p-possible, Mr. Ch-ch-chamberlayne, you can hesitate to p-p-pronounce that e-e-every man should have a p-p-p-purpose?"

There was something so marvelously ludicrous in the feebleness of the individual, contrasted with the apparent vigor of his doctrine, that Cecil could with difficulty restrain his laughter, and hasten to say—

"By no means—by no means. I presume every one has a purpose; but, then, the question is—what purpose?"

"If you admit," said Hester, "that a man must have a purpose, it is surely unreasonable to wish him not to be distinctly conscious of it: then, only, can he best fulfill it; otherwise, he is a mere machine in the hands of fortune. I say, therefore, that the consciousness of our age is the consciousness of progress; each man of any real eminence has a mission, and he knows it; that mission is to get the broad principles of humanity in its entire developments fully recognized. That mission," she continued, with rising warmth, "is to sweep from the face of the earth the worn-out sophisms which enslave it; to give mind its high prerogatives; to cut from the heart of society the cancer of conventionalism which corrupts it; to place man in majestic antagonism to convention; to erect the banner of progress, and give the democratic mind of Europe its unfettered sphere of action."

"A grand scheme," replied Cecil, smiling; "but how is all this to be accomplished?"

"By indomitable re-re-resolution; b-b-h-by f-f-f-ixity of p-p-purpose," suggested Jukes.

"By a recognition of the rights of women," sternly remarked the philosophical Mrs. Fuller.

"The Greeks," began Mrs. James Murch, "whose literature—"

Here she was interrupted by Miss Stoking, who thought that if readers were not so fond of "trash," and would only look into the "Chronicles," something considerable might result.

The epic poet—the celebrated author of "Mount Horeb, and other Poems"—thought the age was not religious enough: there was not enough divine aspiration in the souls of modern men to bring about any grand revolution.

Mr. Blundell (the kind of "Boz," as his friends told him) thought that there was a deficiency of wit, and referred to a "government tempered with epigrams" as his ideal.

Hester would admit of nothing but the "broad Principles of Humanity:" upon these she stood.

"My dear Miss Mason," said Mrs. Murch, "surely the Greeks, whose literature—"

"And women?" interposed Mrs. Fuller. "Are women not destined to play a great part in the reformation of society?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Hester; "the greatest part—I am quite of your opinion. Society must be reorganized, and in its new structure women must fill their proper place; they must be consulted—their rights must be recognized. You have no idea," she added, turning to Cecil, "what an enormous difference there would be if society were reconstructed with a view to the equal partition of power between man and woman."

"I beg your pardon," he said, laughing; "I have a very formidable idea of it. In fact, I think there is already too great a preponderance of female influence."

A chorus of indignant astonishment followed this from all the ladies except from Mrs. Murch, who, pertinaciously sticking to her yet unexpressed idea, began—

"Now, my belief is that the Greeks, whose literature—"

"You protest," said Cecil, not noticing Mrs. Murch, "against my dictum? But hear me. The gradual softening of manners, by constraining men to relinquish their advantage in physical force, has destroyed the balance of power, and unbeaten woman has the upper hand."

Hester laughed; the philosophical Mrs. Fuller frowned; and Mrs. Murch fastened upon poor Blundell, to expatiate to him in confidence on the literature of the Greeks; but even here she was not allowed to proceed far before he interrupted her with the question—

"Had the Greeks a 'Boz!'"

She turned from him with a look of withering contempt.

All this while Frank Forrester was engaged at a corner card-table, winning an ambitious young farce-writer's money at *écarté*; having emptied his pockets of seven pounds and a few shillings, Frank rose from the table and joined the talkers. But Cecil's jest had changed the conversation, and as it was getting late he prepared to depart.

"What! going so early?" reproachfully asked Hester.

Had Cecil been a vainer man, or one caring less for his wife, that look and tone would have been plainly significant to him; but he noticed nothing, and merely said—

"They are waiting up for me at home."

"And your wife will scold you," said she, pettishly.

"No; but worse than that—I shall reproach myself."

She gave him her hand, coldly, and wished him good-night.

CHAPTER III.

THE TIGER TASTES BLOOD.

Cis, my boy," said Frank, as they stepped into the street, "you have made a conquest, there; poor Chetsom!"

"Pshaw!" said Cecil, "don't be absurd, Frank; she knows I'm married."

Frank stopped—turned him round to look him full in the face—and then whistled.

"Cis, your innocence—if it be not hypocrisy—is worthy of a primitive age. Married! She knows you're married! Ha! ha! ha! By George! you remind me of that vaudeville we saw last year at the *Variétés* in Paris, where Lafont embraces Ozy, who repulses him with—*Mais, Mosieu, j'aime mon mari;* to which Lafont, stupefied at such innocence, as I am at yours, replies—*Tiens! tu aimes ton mari? c'est bizarre, sans doute; mais enfin ce n'est pas defendu!*"

"Joke as you please; I repeat, Hester knows I am married, and may easily see that I have no disposition to be unfaithful."

"Cis, you ought to have a statue! Damn my whiskers!" They walked on for some moments without speaking. "By the way, Cis, you asked me to lend you some money. I hadn't it then, I have now. I won a few yellow boys of a conceited ass who had the amiable weakness of fancying he could play *écarté*—and with me too—with *me!* It is but a paltry seven that I won, but that properly placed must bring in more. I think you have never played *rouge et noir*, have you?"

"Never; nor do I intend."

"Nonsense! look here: Men always win at first: it's an invariable rule. Fortune always seduces youngsters with smiles. Now, I'll lend you five pounds, if you will try your luck, and give me a third of your winnings."

Cecil refused, was pressed, and refused again; but he never could withstand Frank for any length of time, and ended by accompanying him to a gambling-house. They knocked at the door; and, after a scrupulous examination on the part of the porter, who did not at first recognize Frank—no one being admitted except when introduced by a frequenter of the house—they ascended to the drawing-room, where they found a rather numerous assembly.

There were three tables. That in the center was the most attended: it was the *rouge et noir* table. That on the left was devoted to roulette; that on the right to hazard. There was a low hubbub and confusion of voices, above which rose these sounds:

"Make your game, gentlemen."

"The game is made."

"Seven's the main."

"Red wins."

Cecil approached the center table, and was instantly made way for by two lookers-on. At the side center sat the dealer, before him two packs of cards placed together; beside him two croupiers. Opposite sat two croupiers, and a man who collected and shuffled the cards. Piles of gold, bank notes, and silver counters were glittering on the table, enough to awaken the spirit of gain in the most prudent breast.

It was a painful sight. The features of the players were distorted by anxiety; those of the dealer and croupiers had become hardened into masks, more hideous in their sodden calmness than agitation could have made them.

Painful, also, the contrasts afforded by the players. Some were reckless, others calculating; some were feverish in their impatience; others lost in quiet despair small sums which to them were fortunes; while several passed hours together, pricking a card with a pin, and trying to wrest the secret of the capricious goddess, by counting the turns of her wheel; then, after as much calculation and patience as would, if directed to any honest employment, have produced a tangible result, hazarding their solitary half-crown, and losing it, in astonishment and dismay.

Seedy, withered men were also there, whose whole existence depended upon their trivial gains; who daily risked their few shillings, content to retire with a few shillings gain, which they took home to their wretched families—and if they lost, content to abide the loss, without further risk that day. There was one man there who bore the unmistakable marks of a gentleman, in spite of the worn, anxious face, and seedy dress; he was never known to miss an evening, and never to play more than four coups on each evening. His stake was invariably half a crown, and it was rare indeed that he did not win three coups out of the four—timing his stake with such knowledge of the chances. With the seven and sixpence or ten shillings he thus gained, he supported a wife and five children.

Is there not something singularly distressing in such an existence? To struggle daily with the capricious turns of fortune for a miserable three half-crowns, and to gain that only by consummate self-mastery! Yet there are men who choose such a life, rather than one of honorable labor; men who have mastery enough over their passions to be cool *at* the gaming-table, yet not sufficient mastery to keep *from* it! This would be inexplicable did we not know the powerful attraction of all exciting uncertainty: did we not recognize the inherent desire for emotional excitement which is implanted in every heart. In honorable labor such men have not learned to seek their excitement—they find it at the gaming-table; and hence the fascination of gaming. It is to be noted, in confirmation of what has just been said that inveterate gamesters are thoroughly aware of the enormous disadvantage at which they play—thoroughly convinced the bank *must* win—yet they play!

The scene was new to Cecil, and affected him painfully, as it always does those who are not carried away by the passion of gaming; but he was there to play *once*, and he surmounted his disgust; inwardly vowing that whatever might be the fortune of that night, he would never repeat the experiment.

The room was singularly quiet, considering

how many persons were assembled. The sounds of bottles being uncorked, the clatter of glasses, and the chink of money were distinctly audible; conversation being carried on for the most part in whispers.

Cecil played. Frank, trusting entirely to the good fortune which so proverbially favors beginners, abstained from giving him any advice. He played at random, and lost. His five pounds were soon gone. Frank slipped the other two into his hand; they followed the others. As the last crown disappeared, Cecil saw a young man heap together a pile of notes and sovereigns; huddling them into his pocket, he called for some champagne, and having drunk it, departed. He came down stairs at the same moment with Frank and Cecil, in high spirits.

"That's what we ought to have done," said Frank.

"Why did you force me to play?" said Cecil, bitterly; like all weak men throwing the blame of his own folly upon others.

"Who the devil would have supposed you could lose the first time?"

"Well—it is a bit of experience. Perhaps I have bought it cheap, after all."

He walked home, however, as angry as if he were by no means so satisfied with the bargain; and Blanche, who was sitting up for him as usual, was surprised to find him so out of humor. He was sometimes tired when he came home, but always ready to talk freely with her, and recount the adventures of the day. That night he was taciturn, and gave evasive, short replies to all her questions; till at last she saw that he was unwilling to talk, and left him in peace.

He was restless that night. It was long before he went to sleep; and when he did fall into a fitful doze, he was troubled by strange dreams of the gaming-table. Sometimes he was playing with a pile of notes before him; sometimes he had lost every shilling, and awoke in his despair—to find himself in bed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG FATHER.

Life is too short for mean anxieties;
Soul! thou must work, though blindfold.
KINGSLEY.—*The Saints' Tragedy.*

THE next morning Cecil had almost regained his cheerfulness. The thought of last night's loss would occasionally dash his spirits, for seven pounds, in his situation, was not a trifling sum.

"When is your mother going to send us any money?" he said; "does she imagine we can get on without it?"

"I expect her every day; but perhaps, dear, she has not been able to save any."

"Pshaw! if she chose—"

"When will your opera be ready, dearest?"

"I'm sure I don't know—but soon, I hope. Something must be done, Blanche, for our condition is really pitiable. Thank God, we have no children!"

Blanche trembled, and colored violently as he said this; but summoning courage, she laid her hand upon his shoulder and asked—

"Why thank God for that, Cecil?"

"Why? because it is a great blessing."

"And should we not think children a blessing?"

"No!"

She hesitated; and then went on—

"Do you mean to say, Cecil, you would not be very proud and very happy to dandle a child of your own—with your own dear eyes and lovely smile?"

"No; I don't like brats."

"But your children would not be brats. Oh! you would love them, I know you would; you would be as proud of them as I should. Only think, how darling it would be to have a little cherub here with us—"

"Yes, yes—there's the sentimentality of women! They only think of the cherub—not of the red, squalling, slobbering, troublesome baby. They only think of the pleasure of dandling, kissing, hugging, dressing, and attending on it;—it is a plaything to them, and they never think of the expense."

"No, dearest Cecil, they do not; nor would *you*. The love for our offspring which God has planted in our hearts, is too pure, too healthy and unselfish, not to override every other feeling. The poorest parents are always glad to have more children, because more children means more love."

A sudden suspicion crossed him; he seized hold of her, and looking closely in her face, said—

"Blanche, it strikes me you have some motive for pleading in this way in favor of children. I never heard you so eloquent before. Let me know the worst. Are you—"

She hid her blushing face in his bosom, and pressed him to her convulsively.

"The devil!" was his brutal exclamation.

A vision of a large family and destitution stood before him, and his heart sank at the prospect.

"Are you not glad?" she asked him gently, not raising her face from its resting-place.

"Glad!" he exclaimed with vehemence, "glad at the prospect of bringing children to share our poverty! Glad, when I know not how we are to exist ourselves, to learn that fresh burdens are to come upon us! This is a nice place to rear a child in! It will have every comfort; we shall be so comfortable: such a nursery! And when I come home harassed from my day's work, wanting repose and quiet, a squalling baby will be so pleasant! Glad; yes, yes, there's a great deal to be glad about!"

She crept from him, and sank upon a chair.

"How the child is to be provided for, God only knows. We can't stop here. They would not keep us with the nuisance of a child in the house. We must seek some miserable lodging of our own, and there live squalidly. And to think of your being rejoiced at such an event: that is so like women!"

Her little heart was breaking, and half stifled sobs burst from her as he continued. It was indeed a fearful trial for the young mother! She had hoped to see him as proud and happy as herself; she had hoped that the child would be a fresh link between them—a link which, by making their poor home more cheerful to him, would have kept him oftener with her. And this was his answer!

She covered her face in her hands, and wept scalding tears of heart-breaking misery.

Her sobs pierced his heart; he could not withstand them. He loved her too dearly to see her sorrowing unmoved; and forgetting in that sight all his selfish fears and calculations, he caught her in his arms and exclaimed, "Blanche—my own beautiful Blanche! don't cry—I am a brute—I did not mean it—indeed I did not. Look up. There; see, I *am* glad; I will be glad. You are right. My fears were foolish. We shall be all the happier! Don't sob so, my blessed one—you kill me!"

"Oh, Cecil, Cecil!" she sobbed, as she threw her arms round him convulsively.

"My own pet, don't cry now. I was taken by surprise. I only thought of our poverty. You are right. Poorer people are happy in their children, why should we not be? Dry your eyes, beauty. There; you see I am quite come round. I hope it will be a girl: a dear little petkin, just like its darling mother. Fancy a toddling Blanche! won't it be a beauty? It must be christened Blanche—eh? Or suppose it's a boy, what name shall we give it? Tell me, beauty."

She only kissed him feverishly; she could not speak: her trembling agitation was not yet subdued, and the tears continued to fall fast.

"What a Turk he will be; won't he? Just like his mother—you are a Turk, you know, pet!"

Blanche smiled faintly.

"There, you begin to smile—that's right. I see I am forgiven. Dry your eyes, they are quite swollen. You don't look at all handsome when you cry—no, not at all. There, now you laugh, you are yourself again—laugh away those tears, or I will take your portrait as you are, and your children shall see their mother as the Niobe of the nineteenth century. Will you be painted as Niobe?"

She laughed again, but it was slightly hysterical. However, by caresses and cajoleries, he brought her round at last, and her eyes were dried. They were soon talking over the prospects of their children, as if nothing had occurred; an occasional sigh—the mere physical effect of previous grief—alone recalling the moment of agony she had escaped. Cecil was afraid to leave her, lest she should relapse, so he proposed to take her into town to see the exhibition of old paintings at the British Institution.

Blanche was perfectly happy. She had been but too readily persuaded that he was, on reflection, really delighted at the prospect of a family; she wished so to believe it! And he was more charming and cajoling than ever.

Had she loved him less, the foregoing scene would have completely disenchanted her; but love sealed her eyes, and she saw no selfishness no unmanly weakness in his horror at the idea of a child. She saw nothing, in fact, but what he chose her to see: his affection, and his warm, caressing manners.

Although Cecil never allowed Blanche to suspect that he was otherwise than delighted, and although he even tried to convince himself that, after all, there was nothing disagreeable in having a family; that it was one of the inevitable conditions of marriage, and therefore should be accepted with cheerful resignation; yet did the idea frequently depress him.

This much is to be urged in favor of the unwillingness of fathers to incur the burden of children: that while the maternal instinct from the very first—nay, even in girlhood—makes the woman look forward with anticipative joy to the time of becoming a mother, the paternal instinct is seldom developed until the child is actually there to call it forth. Fathers love their children as much, or nearly so, as mothers; but fathers do not as mothers do, love *prospective* children. The man contemplates the expense, trouble, and responsibility of children, which the woman, with beautiful improvidence never thinks about; but when the children are born, the man joins the woman in forgetting, in their joy, the drawbacks to their joy.

Cecil was just the man to make a doating, spoiling father to the very child whose announcement made him so serious.

The seriousness with which he accepted his lot would have been incalculably beneficial to him, had he possessed a grain or two more of moral resolution. It impressed him once more with the conviction of the necessity for work. It stimulated him again to daily labor. Warned by the state of his finances, he relinquished the idle dreaming of genius awaiting inspiration, and began to set his shoulder to the wheel.

So strenuously did he work, that in less than three weeks he finished his comic opera, words and music, and had now to begin the arduous task of getting it performed.

CHAPTER V.

RENUNCIATION.

J'aurais dans la mémoire une place sacrée;
Mais vivre près de toi, vivre l'âme ulcérée,
O ciel! moi qui n'aurais jamais aimé que toi,
Tous les jours, peux-tu bien y songer sans effroi,
Je te ferais pleurer j'aurais mille pensées
Que je ne dirais pas, sur les choses passées
J'aurais l'air d'épier, de douter, de souffrir.

VICTOR HUGO.—*Marion de Lorme.*

THE termination of Cecil's opera was coincident with that fearful scene previously recorded, wherein Marmaduke avowed his passion to Violet, and unwittingly achieved his vengeance upon Mrs. Vyner.

On quitting the room, Violet had promised him to renew their interrupted interview, but she had made that promise unthinkingly, and when in solitude she reflected on all that had passed, felt herself unequal to it. Greatly had Marmaduke's confession relieved her, but greatly also had it pained her.

She could now indulge her love for him without remorseful bitterness and contempt, though not with any hope. He was reinstated in her good opinion. He was not false and fickle. He had not loved Mrs. Vyner. His attentions—those attentions which had given her such pain—were explained; and in her joy at the explanation, she overlooked what had been criminal in them, to see only that they did not affect his love for her. Well was it conceived by the mythologists to make Love blind!

But this joy was dashed with the recollection that he never could be hers. All that had trans

pired would prevent their union. Neither her father nor her step-mother could be expected to give their consent; and with their consent, if it were given, she still felt that her own must be withheld. How could she ever accept the man who had been both seriously and treacherously the lover of her father's wife—the man whom that wife loved?

The horrible sarcasm in which Mrs. Vyner bade her "accept her leavings," still rankled in the proud soul of Violet, and created an irremediable loathing. It was under these mixed emotions that she sat down and wrote the following letter—

"Your frankness deserves a frank reply. I feel myself unable to meet you again, after what has passed—you must understand why; but I can not refuse an answer to your declaration.

"If it be any consolation—if it alleviate the pain my resolution may inflict upon you—know that your love is returned. Yes, Marmaduke, I love you. I tell you so without reserve, without maidenly timidity. I love you. But the very fearlessness with which I make this avowal arises from the fixedness of my purpose. It is because I can never see you again, because our union has become *impossible*, that I am tempted to unvail my soul before you. No, Marmaduke, I was not playing with you; I was not encouraging attentions because they flattered my vanity—I encouraged them because I loved.

"You asked me for forgiveness; and the deep, sad tones of your repentant voice are ringing in my ears. I do forgive you, Marmaduke; forgive you all the pain your conduct gave me. I can excuse your error. I can feel that it was a crime made almost venial by the circumstances and your education. The moment when, with vengeance in your hands, you drew back from its accomplishment, and acknowledged to yourself that it was unworthy of a man, that it was a crime, not an act of justice—that moment purified your soul—that moment redeemed you in your own eyes and in mine.

"But, Marmaduke, I can not *forget* as easily as I can forgive. Nothing can banish from my mind the hideous remembrance of what *has been*, and what *is*. The thought that you had once loved *her* would poison all my happiness; and the thought that she still loves you!—Oh! is not that fearful? You see how undisguisedly I write to you! It tears me to pieces, but it must be done, once for all. I shall not write again. I shall not see you again. Far away from you, I shall struggle with my sorrow, and conquer it, I hope, in time. Far away from you, I shall not cease to think of you; and memory will solace me with your image. I shall hear your voice, see your deep eyes loving me, press your hand, and so cheat my misery. But away from you I must go. Must I not? Do you not see the necessity? Do you not feel that our union is utterly hopeless? How could we escape the circumstances of our unhappy lot? My father would never consent—*she* would never consent; and if I renounced all, if I fled with you from home and country, how could I escape from my own conscience? ..ow could I forget?

"I renounce the hope of happiness. I have only now to bear with fortitude my wretched fate. Forget me, Marmaduke. No, that is an idle phrase—I do not mean it. Do not forget me; think of me, think of me often, and love me still, if you can; at least pity me, and imitate me. Accept fate; bow your head to its irresistible decree; but do not despair. Life has other purposes than love; other purposes even than happiness; let those occupy you. In this life we are separated, but we shall meet above. It is but a brief moment's pain, and we shall then pass away into a brighter, purer sphere, and have a whole eternity to love in; there our sorrows will be stilled; that let us await!

"I have stained this paper with my tears—I will not affect to hide them. I must weep, for my heart is breaking, Marmaduke; but I shall not flinch. I know what it is I am about to do; know how much pain it will give me; but I can do it, and I will. Weep I must, for I am a woman; but I can endure.

"If my tears make this almost illegible, do not suppose that they will weaken me. I am unalterable. Tears strengthen me; they relieve the tightness of my straining heart; I do not check them. I shall shed many, very many, ere I quit this world; but life itself is very short, and I look beyond the grave.

"God bless you, my own beloved, and give you courage to bear the inevitable! Love me, and pray for me. God bless you! Oh, how it pains me to say—farewell!

"VIOLET."

This letter was put into the post as the miserable girl departed from home, on a visit to her uncle in Worcestershire, with whom she contemplated passing the remainder of her days; certain that he would be but too happy to have her, and feeling that home was now uninhabitable.

CHAPTER VI.

MAN PURIFIED BY EXPERIENCE.

My desolation does begin to make
A better life.
SHAKSPEARE.—*Antony and Cleopatra.*

WHO shall describe the delight and grief of Marmaduke on reading that letter? She loved him; but she refused him. He saw as plainly as she did the reason of her refusal, and bitterly cursed himself for having drawn such a net around him. But was there no issue? Could nothing be devised which would in some way remove this obstacle? Nothing, nothing.

He called and was refused admittance. He wrote to Rose, who replied that her sister had left London, but had enjoined inviolable secrecy as to the place of her destination.

Marmaduke had nothing to do but await in sullen despair the hazard which might again bring him into communication with Violet, having failed in all attempts to get a clew to her present residence. But she loved him; that was a sweet thought to alleviate his sorrow: she loved him; and with that conviction he could afford to await events.

He ceased almost to hold communication with the world; shut up in his study he led a solitary, meditative, studious life, strangely at variance with his former occupations. A noble resolution had taken possession of his soul; the conviction that he was loved by so great a woman made him desirous of becoming more worthy of her love. Knowing Violet's high thoughts and sympathy with greatness, he resolved to make a name. Parliament, the great field of Englishmen's ambition, was the arena chosen for the contest. His previous education had but ill-fitted him to make a display there; yet to strong will, energy, and ability what can be denied?

He set himself to the task with the impetuous ardor which characterized all his acts. He studied history, political economy, and what may be called political ethics. He read and re-read the orators, ancient and modern, not with a view of copying their peculiarities, but to draw therefrom certain general conclusions respecting the art by which masses of men are swayed. Burke, the great thinker, great orator, and incomparable writer, was his constant companion.

In this solitude his mind became strengthened, nourished, and enlarged, and at the same time his moral nature became more developed and purified. Nothing could ever eradicate certain defects of his organization—defects which were the shadows thrown by his best qualities. Nothing could ever have made him calm, moderate, unprejudiced, or self-sacrificing. Passionate, reckless, and excitable Nature had made him; and no education, no trials, could alter his disposition. But these very qualities, with their accompanying defects, fitted him for an orator, whose splendid enthusiasm, overbearing impetuosity, audacious courage, and irresistible bursts of passion were capable of swaying mankind. He was born to command and to lead; education and a high purpose were now fitting him for the office.

While he was thus acquiring the means wherewith an honorable name is made, he was also gaining those clear moral ideas by which alone a great name can long be honorably maintained. The more he became aware of the imperishable importance of high morality, the more painfully did he recoil at the remembrance of his unpardonable conduct with Mrs. Vyner. The clearer his moral perceptions grew, the more iniquitous, the more contemptible appeared his passion for vengeance.

"What must Violet think of me?" was his frequent self-questioning; and he shuddered at the idea. Henry Taylor has profoundly said, that conscience is, in most men, the anticipation of the opinion of others. It is so in all men. It is the horror we feel at contemplating the probable judgment which those we respect and love will form on our acts. So it was with Marmaduke. He had learned to view his conduct in its true light; he doubted not that Violet must look at it with the same loathing; and bitter reproaches assailed him. Often and often did he dwell upon that part of her letter wherein she excused him; but it seemed so slight, he could not believe her wholly sincere. She was sincere when she wrote it, but would not subsequent reflection show her, as it had shown him, the whole affair under another aspect? It would—it must.

He forgot one thing: that he looked upon his error with the anxious and probing severity of one who repents, and that she looked upon it with the blindness of one who loves!

For the sake of clearness, I have told you in this chapter the history of several months, and may now leave Marmaduke at his studies, to return to the other persons, whose fortunes were more varied.

CHAPTER VII.

POOR VYNER.

Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.

BYRON.

When Meredith Vyner came into the drawing-room and found his wife senseless on the floor, he imagined she had been seized with a fit, for he was unaware of Marmaduke having been in the house. Mrs. Vyner availed herself of the supposition, and so escaped irritating inquiries; she just mentioned that she had been very much distressed and excited that morning, and that doubtless her fit had been greatly owing to it.

"And what distressed you, my love?"

"Oh, I can not tell you."

"Yes; do, dear, do tell me."

"Will you promise not to mention a word of it to Violet?"

"I will."

"Well, then, it was on her account. You know how I wished for a match between her and young Ashley? You know his audacious love for me? I tried to make him relinquish his foolish hopes—I tried to lead him to think of her. He scorned the idea—vowed he loved me, and only me—and was so violent that I was obliged to order him to quit the house, and never to reenter it. He left me in a great passion. It is a rupture forever."

Instead of feeling in the least distressed at this rupture, Meredith Vyner could not conceal his joy. What cared he for Violet's sorrow—was not his rival got rid of?

He redoubled his attentions to his wife—now wholly his, he thought!—and felt that the great misery he had dreaded was now forever banished. When Violet came to him, therefore, to ask his permission to go down to her uncle, he gave it willingly, and without inquiry.

Marmaduke dismissed, how happy now would the house be! Mary would again become the sprightly, cajoling, attentive wife; she would again come into his study to hear him read aloud; would again interest herself in Horace. By the way, he had sadly neglected Horace of late; not a single emendation had been made; not a note written. That could not continue. He had no time to lose. He was no longer young. If age should creep on before he had finished that great work, what a loss to literature!

Alas! neither home nor Horace profited by this dismissal of a rival. The attentive wife grew pettish, irritable, and more avowedly indifferent than ever. Her health was seriously affected. She was subject to hysterics, which

came on apparently without cause. Her gayety had entirely disappeared, and she was often found in tears. She would rally, from time to time, and endeavor, in incessant dissipation, to escape from the torment of her thoughts; but this never lasted long; she soon relapsed again into a capricious, fretful, malicious, melancholy state of mind.

She had, indeed, received a deep wound. That conscience which, in its anticipation of the opinion of others, so troubled the studious Marmaduke, was an awful retribution on Mrs. Vyner. The thought that he had duped her and had excited her love—for she had loved him—merely as a means of revenge, was of itself sufficient to rouse her to exasperation; but when to that was added the thought of Violet knowing it—of the detested Violet, who had always seen through and scorned her, and who now held the secret of her guilty passion—it became a rankling poison in her soul. Nor was the fury of jealousy absent. This villain who had played with her, did he not love the haughty girl who despised her?

The poor old pedant was at a loss to comprehend the cause of his wife's conduct. She could not love Marmaduke, or why should she dismiss him; yet, if she did not love him, why was she so miserable?

In vain he tried by kindness to revive within her that semblance of affection with which she had hitherto cheated him. She ceased all hypocrisy, though hypocrisy would have been kindness. She received his demonstrations of affection with exasperating indifference, and when he, on one or two occasions, endeavored to exert his authority—for he was master in his own house, he supposed—she only laughed at him.

The poor old man retired to his books, but not to read; in mute distress he ruminated on the change which had taken place, and sat there helpless and hopeless. He tried to forget these painful thoughts in occupying himself with his great work; but he sat there, the book open before him, the pen idle in his hand, and the snuff-box his only consolation.

His domestic peace was gone, and he began to perceive it.

CHAPTER VIII.

REHEARSAL OF THE OPERA.

"Good news, pet," said Cecil, dancing into the room, one afternoon. "Moscheles, whom I meet sometimes, you know, at Hester Mason's, has looked over my opera, and likes it very much; he has even proposed that we should have a sort of private rehearsal of it at his house next week, and has undertaken to secure the singers, and Bunn is to be there to hear it."

"That is good news, indeed."

"Yes, we shall be rich now. It has given me fresh courage; I feel I can finish *Nero*."

"Mamma has been here to-day with Rose, and has brought us thirty pounds. She is very ill—very ill, indeed, and the physicians don't know what is the matter. Rose and Violet are already busy with the baby linen, and Rose insists on being godmother."

"With all my heart! I'm so happy, pet-kin!" and he danced about the room like a school-boy on receiving intelligence of a half-holiday.

"We must move away from this hole at once, pet. We will take comfortable apartments somewhere."

"Let us rather wait a while; the opera is not accepted yet, you know."

"But it will be, and it must succeed—I feel it must."

The gleam of hope which now shone on his prospects, made Cecil almost another man. He worked steadily at "Nero," and finished it before the hearing of his opera took place. It was sent to the Academy. When it took its place in the exhibition, it would infallibly excite a sensation; crowds would gaze enraptured on it; critics would proclaim its merits in all the journals, and some nobleman of taste would become the proud purchaser. Their prospects were brilliant. Happy dreams of young ambition in its first struggles with circumstance! How many a sad spirit have ye not soothed and strengthened!

The hearing of his opera took place. Moscheles himself presided at the piano, playing the accompaniments and overture with his exquisite skill. Henry Phillips, Wilson, Stretton, and a certain prima donna, who shall be nameless, were the singers, Cecil undertaking some of the minor parts. The choruses were omitted; only the solos and concerted pieces were executed, but they gave general satisfaction.

Private rehearsals, like private readings, are however, always successful, and a little excellence produces a great effect on friendly auditors. The singer thought so great by his friends, whose success at parties is so brilliant, finds to his cost that concert-rooms and audiences are not so easily pleased. Bunn had experience enough of such matters to be aware of all this, and though he saw a chance of success with the opera, he was rather guarded in his language. On the whole, however, he was disposed to give the work a trial.

That satisfied Cecil. He thought, the first step gained, the victory was his. Experience came with its bitter lesson to undeceive him. In the dramatic world, success is only purchased by a series of hard-won battles. In no province of human endeavor has a man to endure more thankless labor; in no province is luck more potent. To write a play or an opera is the smallest of the artist's difficulties. Once written, he has to get the manager's acceptance; few things more arduous than that, if the artist be not already celebrated. Cecil had by a fortunate accident achieved this feat. A manager had listened to and approved of his work. In his innocence, Cecil imagined the day was his own. He knew nothing of actors and singers. The prima donna absolutely declined to perform her part; so did the second tenor. And their reasons? Their reasons were simply these:—

The heroine of the opera was a Miss Hopkins, daughter of a vulgar cheesemonger. H. Phillips was willing to play the cheesemonger, but the prima donna would not play the daughter. She had been used to play spangled prin-

cesses, with feathers in her hair; or picturesque peasants, with short petticoats and striped stockings; and the idea of her appearing as a cheesemonger's daughter, minus spangles, feathers, short petticoats, and striped stockings! In vain it was represented to her that the opera was a comic opera; she did not wish to excite laughter, but sentiment; and she was dogged in her resolution.

The second tenor was a sentimental warbler. He not only objected to Wilson playing the best part, he also objected to his own part as "out of his line."

Owing to the beautiful arrangements of our dramatic system, the "stars" have not only absolute right to dictate to authors and composers, but also in effect to dictate to managers. They would all cut down a play or an opera to single parts if they could; and while ludicrously sensitive to their own reputation, are remorselessly indifferent to the author's, as well as to the manager's purse.

What would Shakspeare, Jonson, Moliere, or Calderon say, could they rise from their graves to witness our beautiful dramatic system? How is it some Churchill does not take the whip in hand to lash this miserable arrogance of the stage? While vanity, pretension, and injustice, in other shapes, are laughed at and exposed, why do they escape when they appear in the preposterous demands of actors, singers, and dancers?

In his indignation, Cecil wrote a satire. Unfortunately he was not a Churchill; his satire was violent, but weak, and weak because of its violence. Besides, he was fighting his own cause; *indignatio fecit versum*, and the public only saw an angry author smarting from imaginary or exaggerated injuries.

Cecil's discouragement may be imagined. He, who at no time was able to contend manfully against obstacles, was the last person to rise with the occasion, and vanquish opposition by determined will.

To complete his discouragement, the Exhibition had opened, and no wondering crowds collected round his "Nero." Very few of the critics noticed it, and they noticed it coldly or contemptuously. One who recognized a certain grandeur in the idea, was pitiless in his criticism of the execution; which he pronounced "crude," "chalky," "opaque," "slovenly," and "incorrect."

Cecil sneered at the "envy" and "ignorance" of the critics, as authors usually sneer at those who do not admire them; though why a man who does not paint, should be "envious" of a man who paints badly, I have not yet discovered. Vauvenargues has an admirable remark:—"Un versificateur ne connait point de juge compétent de ses écrits: si on ne fait pas de vers on ne s'y connait pas; si on en fait on est son rival." How constantly do painters illustrate this remark!

Cecil parodied Coriolanus, and to his critics said, "I banish you." He wrapped himself up in his own greatness, and waited the impartial judgment of enlightened judges. By impartial, he meant favorable; that is the meaning of the word in every artist's lexicon. No one, it would seem, was enlightened enough, for no one talked about "Nero;" above all, no one thought of purchasing it. The "envy" of critics seemed to have been shared by connoisseurs and noblemen.

There is something really tragic in certain conditions to which men of superior faculties are daily subject, in their efforts to cut a pathway for themselves through the crowded avenues of fame. Fancy the poor poet unable to find a publisher, and unable to print his work himself. He can not now, as heretofore, stand up in the market-place, and so get a hearing. The press is the only possible mode of proclaiming to the world, that which the poet feels will rouse that world to rapture, and will make him a sort of demigod. Fancy the young barrister sitting in his chambers day after day, in fruitless expectation of a brief. He can not offer his services: he must wait till they be demanded. He can *do* nothing; but must sit there day after day, day after day, seeing little chance of being required, yet forced to remain there on the chance. Fancy also the painter who sees persons crowding the Exhibition, passing over his work, to look out for the works of favorite artists, giving handsome sums for various pictures, yet making no offer for his. Day after day this is renewed, till the last hope ends with the closing of the Exhibition, and he is then forced to congratulate himself, if the dealers will give him a small sum for what he considers a *chef-d'œuvre*.

The parent who has seen and reflected upon this, and yet educates his son as an artist, because it is a "fine thing" to be an artist—the parent who suffers his self love to blind him to his child's want of a decided genius, and chooses to call an ordinary aptitude "genius," is with selfish vanity destroying that child's future hopes of success in life. Music, painting, and sculpture, are arts founded on instincts so strong, and so unmistakable in their early manifestation, that unless the child very early exhibits extraordinary faculty for the arts, the parent should take Nature's warning; and not endeavor by cultivation to raise that flower which only grows wild in the secret spots Nature herself selects.

CHAPTER IX.

CECIL SUCCUMBS.

> Now why must I disturb a dream of bliss?
> And bring cold sorrow 'twixt the wedded kiss?
> How mar the fate of beauty, and disclose
> The weeping days that with the morning rose?
>
> LEIGH HUNT.—*Rimini.*

Ever since that night when Cecil had first entered a gambling-house, and lost the few pounds Frank had lent him, the image of the joyous winner huddling the notes and gold into his pocket, pursued him like a phantom. He had resolved to play no more; he could not afford to lose, and his first venture had been so unfortunate, that he could not hope hazard would be in his favor. Men have extraordinary practical belief or disbelief in their own "luck." Ask a man if he seriously, theoretically believes in any thing of the kind, and he will answer, No. Yet that very man puts his name down in a raffle, or cuts cards against an adversary, or stakes large sums on any game of chance,

"because he always wins"—"because he is so lucky."

Cecil believed himself to be "unlucky." He was therefore averse to gambling. He had played, and—"it was so like his luck"—although the first time, yet he lost.

In spite of this conviction, the image of that fortunate winner with his pile of notes and sovereigns, *would* force itself upon him. While he was painting—while he was reading—at his meals—during his walks—while dozing in bed—that figure stood before him crumpling the notes, calling joyously for the champagne, and sauntering down stairs in thorough self-content. In his imagination he followed that young man through a series of fortunate nights, during which he had amassed a large sum, with which he purchased a charming little house in the country, and foreswore the gaming-table forever. It was a most coherent story, coherent as imagination loves to be.

The real story may be told in few words: three weeks after that prosperous night, the winner, utterly ruined, poisoned himself!

Had Cecil known the real story, it might have made him pause; but he only knew what he had seen, and fancy supplied the rest.

Like a tempting fiend did this image of the winner pursue him—seductive, irritating; he tried to banish it by thinking of his constant ill-luck, but it would return, and his present discouragement made the temptation stronger. By art he could not live. The age was too material; the country too commercial. Why should he struggle and starve when the gaming-table offered its facile resources?

"Frank," said he, "I wish you would take me again to Jermyn-street."

"What! you want to try another *coup*?"

"Yes; I have a presentiment I shall win. At any rate, it is worth risking a few pounds."

"I am going there this evening. Dine with me at the club. I will explain to you an infallible martingale by which we must win. Damme, I'll break all the banks in London."

"How? how?"

"You know enough, Cis, of the game to understand my explanation. The martingale is this: always to back the winning color, and double your losses till you win. Look ye here—suppose I place a pound on the red, and black wins; black is then the winning color and I back it; but having lost, I must double my stake: so I put two pounds on the black. Well, red wins, damn itse yes! I have lost three pounds. What do I? place four pounds on the red, which is then the winning color. If red wins again, I have recovered my three pounds staked, and one pound over. I back red again, and again, so long as red continues to win. Directly black wins, I double my stake and regain my loss."

"I see, I see!"

"It's as clear as day. The only possibility of losing is that red and black should alternately win all the night through; but as that never has been known, we must not think of such a chance."

"But then you only win your original stake each time?"

"Of course; but you are sure to win it. The only objection to our putting our scheme in practice is the absolute necessity for a large sum of money to begin with."

"How so, Frank?"

"Why, my dear fellow, you've no idea how doubling your stake mounts up. To stake a sovereign and lose ten *coups*, you must have at least six hundred pounds in hand; for the stakes run one, two, four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four, one hundred and twenty-eight, two hundred and fifty-six, five hundred and twelve, and so on."

"Whew!"

"That's it."

"And we stake five hundred pounds to win a sovereign?"

"Just so. Unless you play the martingale strictly, you can not be certain of winning: but you must win if you play it."

"Ah! well, then I must give up the idea, for I can not raise the money. Never mind, I'll let chance play for me; martingale or no martingale."

That night they went to the house in Jermyn-street, where Cecil had first played.

Frank won five-and-forty pounds.

Cecil lost every penny.

"Frank, lend me five pounds: I am desperate."

"Here they are, old boy. Play cautiously."

Cecil seized them with a greedy clutch.

"Make your game, gentlemen," said the dull-eyed dealer.

Cecil threw the five sovereigns on the red.

The cards were dealt with leisurely precision.

"*Après*," said the dealer.

The croupiers, in accordance with the laws of the game, deducted half the stakes on the table.

"Is that your caution, Cis?" whispered Frank.

"It is my desperation," he said between his teeth.

"Make your game, gentlemen!"

"The game is made."

"Red wins."

The perspiration burst from Cecil's pores, the tightening suffocation in his breast was relieved. He allowed the money to remain in its place again to take its fortune.

"Make your game, gentlemen," said the dealer in his unvarying voice.

"The game is made."

"Red wins."

There were now ten pounds on the red belonging to Cecil.

"Take up five," suggested Frank.

"No: hit or miss: I risk all."

The gambler's recklessness possessed him; he was in such a state of excitement that he knew not what he did.

"Red wins," again said the dealer.

Twenty pounds were now heaped upon the red.

"Shall you keep the stake there, sir?" asked a smiling gentleman with bushy whiskers, who had taken great interest in the game.

"Yes," said Cecil, resolutely.

"Then I shall back against you," said the smiling gentleman, twirling a whisker round his finger, and throwing half a-crown upon the black, with the air of a man undertaking an important enterprise.

"Red wins," again said the dealer.

"There's a run upon the red," sighed the bushy-whiskered gentleman, as his half-crown was raked away, and forty pounds stood there as Cecil's winnings. "I shall back you this time, sir; you are fortune's favorite, sir. Take a pinch of snuff, sir."

And with recovered hilarity he offered the box to Cecil, who bowed coldly, and took a pinch.

"Make your game, gentlemen," said the dealer.

"Try the red again, Cis," said Frank, "but take up five pounds to guard against accident." He staked twenty pounds himself upon the red.

Cecil followed his advice: he had now five-and-thirty pounds staked.

"The game is made."

"Wait a minute," said the bushy-whiskered gentleman; "I have not yet staked."

He threw down a half-crown upon the red.

These three were the only players who backed the red; upward of two hundred pounds were on the black; and the coup was watched with breathless anxiety.

With unimpassioned, inexpressive face did the dealer throw down the cards, as if all the chances of the game which so excited the players were powerless upon him.

"Red wins," he again said, in his hollow, indifferent voice.

Cecil raked the seventy pounds toward him in a sort of delirium: the sight of the gold was to him like a vision of fairy land.

The smiling snuff-taker snatched up his five shillings, and again requested him to take a pinch.

"Pretty game, sir; very pretty, when fortune takes you in hand."

"We had better cut now," said Frank.

"Not yet."

"Yes, Cis; come while you've got the money. Don't tempt your luck too far."

"I must—I will play another coup. I'll try the red once more."

"Don't: be advised, Cis, don't."

"I must."

"Well, then, wait till the next. Let this deal go by, and try the next."

Cecil did so.

"Black wins," said the dealer.

Frank looked at Cecil, as much as to say, "You see I was right."

Cecil smiled.

His smiling friend was glum, for he had lost two crowns on the red. He threw down another couple of crowns again upon the red.

"Back the winning color," said Frank, staking twenty pounds upon the black.

Cecil made a pile of fifty sovereigns, and placed it also on the black.

He won again.

"Now, Frank, I'm ready to go."

"That's right."

"Waiter, some champagne!"

"And a cigar, waiter!"

Cecil having called for the champagne, placed the gold in his purse, and seemed to have realized his dream: glimpses even of the country house sparkled on the froth of the wine!

His brain was in a whirl, and the chink of money, the rattle of the dice, the unvarying phrases of the dealer, the brief remarks of the players, all sounded like fairy music in his ears. He was impatient to be gone, for he felt that he was succumbing to the fascinations of the place, rightly named a "Hell."

As he went to the side table for his hat, he espied his smiling neighbor standing looking into the glass, with one hand under his chin, fiercely pushing his whiskers forward so as almost to cover his face, while with the other hand he made terrific menaces at the reflection of that face in the glass.

"Ugh! you old fool!" he vituperated his own image, at the same time shaking his fist at it. Did I not *tell* you so? Did I not say you would lose? You ass! you ass! *Five-and-forty* shillings have *you* thrown away *this blessed night!* Five-and-forty *shillings!* Will you *never* learn wisdom—will you never *leave off play?* Ass! fool! *Ass!*"

Cecil with difficulty restrained his laughter, and advanced, saying—

"I'm sorry you have not been fortunate, sir."

"*You* are sorry, are you?" fiercely replied the little man, sharply turning round upon him, delighted at having some one else on whom to vent his wrath. "And pray, sir, who are *you?* Who are you, sir, that *presume* to be *sorry* for *me?* Am I an *ass*, sir? am I a *boy?* am I a *noodle?* to be pestered by the pity of a *puppy* like *you*. Do you wish to *quarrel with me*, sir? do you wish to quarrel? If so, say the *word*. I am not quarrelsome, myself—not I; but I *am not to be bullied*, sir; you shall find that I am not to be bullied. *You may try it on*, sir—you will find it *no go!* And since you are *determined to fight me*, sir, fight you *shall*. You force me to it, but I am not *one* to back out of it."

Cecil looked at him for a moment in surprise, and then quietly turning on his heel, put an arm within Frank's, and went down stairs.

The little fiery gentleman ran his fingers several times through his whiskers, and then turned again to vituperate his own repentant face in the glass. Having relieved his choler thus, he called for some wine, and went home to bed, pathetic and moralizing.

Cecil and Frank supped joyously that night, and threw about their money with the lavish recklessness of those to whom money so gained loses its proper value.

Cecil came home exhausted with excitement, and on his way ruminated how he should deceive Blanche, as to the source of his new gains—

"I will tell her I have sold my Nero for three hundred pounds to a dealer, and this hundred and twenty-five is the sum paid down. That will open the door for fresh winnings!"

How happy did this falsehood make his little wife! At last, then, her Cecil admitted that something was to be done by art. Their future was secured.

Yet happiness, grounded on such falsehoods, must be fragile; and far wiser would it have been for Cecil to have told her the painful truth. She would have been shocked, terrified; she would have entreated him to gamble no more; there would have been a "scene," but who knows what good might not have resulted from it?

Cecil, like all weak men, sought refuge in a falsehood, from the reproaches which he knew must follow an avowal.

CHAPTER X.

A GENTLEMAN'S LIFE.

Your days are tedious, your hours burdensome:
And were't not for full suppers, midnight revels,
Dancing, wine, riotous meetings, which do drown
And bury quite in you all virtuous thoughts,
And on your eyelids hang so heavily
They have no power to look as high as heaven,
You'd sit and look on nothing but despair.

DECKER.

THE next night and the next, Cecil played, and with varying fortunes, sometimes losing to the very last few pounds, at others rising to large gains. The end of the week found him a winner of some four hundred pounds.

He considered himself rich now, and looking on the gaming-table as a bank from which he could at any time draw largely, his first step was to move from Mrs. Tring's.

He took apartments in South Audley-street; furnished them with taste and considerable luxury; engaged two servants, and began to live in a style more corresponding with his previous habits.

A run of luck in his favor having largely increased his resources, he started a cab; and boasted of one of the tiniest tigers in London; a strong, square-built boy of fourteen, who did not look more than ten.

"Is this prudent, dearest?" said Blanche, when he proposed the cab. "Will our means ever permit it?"

"Yes, pet, it is genuine prudence. I am all the rage just now; the dealers are all anxious I should paint them a picture. Moon has offered me a thousand guineas for one to engrave from. I have refused. I must have more. But to command more, it is essential that I should appear rich; the richer I appear, the richer I shall be. A cab is, therefore, policy."

"You know best; but don't forget the little one that is to share our prosperity."

"Forget him, indeed! look here; I have bought him a coral; look at the gold bells! I saw it yesterday—it was a bargain, and I thought the opportunity should not be lost. Isn't it beautiful?"

"Beautiful! How thoughtful of you, dear one!"

"At the same time I saw a love of a watch; That, said I to myself, is just the thing for petkin—and behold!"

He held a gold Breguet before her eyes.

"You dear, kind creature," she said, kissing him; "but I will not have you spend money on me in this way."

She did not remark the diamond studs in his shirt, nor the turquoise-headed cane which dangled from his wrist; she only thought of what he had spent upon a present for her.

Cecil was soon plunged into debt; but a man who has his cab, and is lavish in expense, easily finds enormous credit. He lived as if he had a certain income of two or three thousand a year. Brilliant dinners at the club, small but ruinous dinners at home, suppers, jewelry, cigars, gloves, and elegant trifles for his wife demanded no inconsiderable sums. Rouge et noir and credit supplied his wants. In spite of heavy losses, his luck at play was extraordinary, and was aided by his prudence in always retiring after gaining a certain sum.

The ordinary routine of his life, as it used to be at Mrs. Tring's, was now exchanged for one very unlike it in appearance, but to those who look beneath the surface very like it *au fond*.

He rose late; and sat in his dressing-gown and slippers, smoking cigars at two guineas the pound, turning over the leaves of a novel or new poem, chatting with Blanche, and listening to her plans for the education of their children. Impossible to be more charming than Cecil at such moments! He listened with unfeigned pleasure to her little schemes, threw in a graceful *bon mot* here and there, drew her on his knee, and played with her golden hair, planned amusements for her, and taxed his ingenuity to discover what she would like to have bought.

About twelve he dressed. No rubbing up of gloves—no oiling of boots now. His dress was a matter of study, and he stepped into his cab a perfect dandy.

Blanche, without inquiring, imagined he always went to his painting rooms, but the club or Hester Mason's were his invariable resorts.

He had taken of late to calling frequently on Hester during the day. Not that he was in love with her, but she amused and flattered him. He saw pretty plainly that she regarded him with any thing but indifferent feelings, and no man withstands that sort of flattery. He saw, moreover that Sir Chetsom Chetsom was jealous, and what man is insensible to *that* compliment? He went, therefore, and was always amused.

Poor Hester had fallen seriously in love with him, and although his attentions to her were by no means explicit, yet she could not help fancying he had some love for her. Unfortunately he often brought his wife's name forward, and always spoke of her with an unostentatious respect and affection which cut Hester to the quick.

She who recognized no marriage tie; who thought that love, and love alone, was the only principle of union, was jealous and angry at this obstacle of a wife, and her tirades against marriage were not wholly unselfish. That Cecil loved her, she could not disbelieve—why, then, should he not tell her so!

She did not appreciate the distinction between flattered vanity and love; she did not understand that a man could find delight in her society, and be pleased at her evident partiality, while at the same time cherishing the image of his wife as something inalienable from his heart.

Cecil had no thought of being inconstant, yet he sought Hester's society with pleasure.

After spending an hour or so *tête-à-tête* with her, he would drive down to the club, or into the Park, dine at the club, and spend his night at the Strangers', to which he had recently been admitted, and where he played fifty pound stakes with a recklessness which astonished most of the players, but which, on the whole,

was attended with success. One night he carried off eight hundred pounds.

So large a sum in his possession betrayed to Blanche the source of his sudden prosperity. She had before been uneasy: doubts had crossed her mind; the abundance of money, coupled with his obvious idleness, looked very unlike an artist's gains, and now this eight hundred pounds threw a flash of light on the mystery.

"Cecil, dearest Cecil," she said timidly, "relieve me from my suspense—did you gain this money at play?"

He looked angrily at her, and, puffing forth a volume of smoke, said—

"How else should I gain it?"

She was silent. He continued to smoke fiercely for a minute or so, and then said, sneeringly—

"Did you fancy money was to be gained by art? Did you imagine I was going to follow the example of all the other fools, and wear out my life in a miserable contest for a beggar's pittance? Painting would never support me; it is all very well for the mechanical fellows who make it a *trade;* I could never do *that;* and I have no inclination to starve—there is you to think of—and our child."

Blanche could not reply; every phrase was a stab in her heart; she saw ruin and dishonor scowling upon them, and felt their descent was not to be averted.

"I was born a gentleman, thank God!" he continued, throwing away the end of his cigar, and rising from the sofa as he spoke; "I was bred like a gentleman, and, damme, I will live like a gentleman!"

With this very gentlemanly, honorable sentiment, he walked out of the room.

Relieved from the restraint of his presence, Blanche threw herself upon the sofa, and gave way to a paroxysm of grief. What a blow to her happiness was that fearful discovery! Her husband—her adored Cecil—a gambler! Men living in the world, and accustomed to mingle with those who play, can not overcome their repugnance to a professed gambler; but what is their repugnance compared with the loathing felt by women, whose horror is unmitigated by familiarity? and what is the abstract horror of a woman, compared with the shuddering terror of a wife, who sees written before her in characters of fire the ineffaceable dishonor, the inevitable ruin of her husband and children?

A gambler! her husband was a gambler! The luxuries with which she was surrounded were not the fruits of honest labor, but of dishonorable gaming; the trinkets which he had given her, and which she had held as precious tokens of his affection, were not purchased by his genius and energy, but were purchased from the misery of others; the gold he squandered with a lavish hand, was the gold whose loss carried, perhaps, despair and suicide into many a wretched family. The thought was torture. It turned all her trinkets into manacles. It made the costly furniture around her dark, grim, and reproachful.

Bitter, bitter were the scalding tears which gushed from her, as she brooded on this immeasurable horror! Terrible were the fears which assailed her as she thought of the end—the inevitable end of such a career!

All hope of happiness was now swept from out her life. Their love, which had been so trusting; their sympathy, which had been so perfect; her esteem, which had been so unsullied, where were they? Gone—irrecoverably gone!

In their poverty, how happy they had been! how contented with their lot! In the prospect of the future, made radiant with love—in the thoughts of their children, as sharers and promoters of that love—what blissful dreams had tinged with magic hues the far horizon of a life which blended with the distant life to come! And now, in one single moment, all those dreams were shattered, and the horizon darkened with thunder-clouds over a stormy sea.

You may have seen a graceful vine, heavy with clusters of the purple grape, trailed up against a garden wall; the rusty nail that fastens it, half falling from out the crumbling wall; and you have felt that the first gust of autumnal wind must tear it completely out, and hurl the poor drooping vine upon the ground.

That is an image of their life. By no stronger bond were they now separated from ruin: one turn of Fortune's capricious wheel, and they were lost.

Weep, weep, poor wretched girl! weep and prepare yourself for greater woe! The babe which now moves beneath your heart, in the dim newness of its being, whose birth was to have been the advent of such joy; what will it be born to? Weep, and prepare yourself for greater woe!

CHAPTER XI.

DEEPER, AND DEEPER STILL.

Elle s'efforça de lui éviter la souffrance en lui cachant la sienne; elle s'habitua à souffrir seule, à n'avoir ni appui, ni consolation, ni conseil.

GEORGE SAND.—*André.*

THE discovery of her husband's pursuits was made too late. Cecil had become a confirmed gambler; and although he saw—saw with anger and remorse—that his wife was heart-broken at the discovery, and could not be deluded by the fluent sophisms with which he tried to persuade her that he had no other career left—could not believe his present pursuits were only temporary, to be given up as soon as he had won sufficient money to be independent; yet his remorse only tormented, it did not cure him. It made him uneasy at home; made him seek excitement elsewhere, in which to intoxicate his conscience. And he continued to win!

Perhaps, had Violet been his wife, instead of the meek, resigned Blanche, the greater force of her will, and directness of her mind might have cowed him. Violet might have shamed him into honor. Her courage and her inflexible will, by braving his anger, by enduring scenes of domestic misery, but by unflinchingly keeping to the point, might, with one so weak, so impressionable, and so affectionate, have rescued him from perdition. But Blanche was ill-suited to such a task. Her spirit, never strong, had been early broken. She had learned to endure evils, not to combat them. She bowed her head to the stroke, and exerted all her strength in gaining fortitude to endure.

Violet would have acted energetically, where Blanche only wept in silence.

Her tears distressed and irritated him; they made him impatient at her "folly," by bringing painfully home to him the sense of his own. Yet, inasmuch as he loved her, he could not see her constant melancholy without anguish; and in moments of contrition he had several times solemnly assured her that he would never again touch a card. The assurance made her deliriously happy for a day or two; but it never lasted long: he broke his vow, made it again, and again broke it. In fact, the fascination of the gaming-table was irresistible; and Frank Forrester was always at his elbow, like a tempter. So often had he deceived her, that she only smiled a melancholy smile, when he now promised never to play again. She had resigned herself to her fate as hopeless!

"Damn it, Cis," said Frank one day, "when are you going to play scientifically? You might try the martingale now: you've got the capital."

"My dear Frank, I lost six hundred pounds last night—and that, too, in trying your famous martingale."

"The devil you did!"

"Yes, and heartily I cursed you for having told me of it."

"Justice, Cis, damme, justice! If you lost money by my martingale, it must be because you didn't play it, for I'll stake my honor—or any thing equally valueless upon it, that my plan is infallible."

"Perhaps so; if one could play it. But the fact is, one had need be a machine to play it."

"Of course—of course. That's why you should have let me play: I'm cast-iron. You could not resist the temptation of risking now and then, and in that risk you lost."

"Don't tell me, Frank. No man can sit playing all night, and winning paltry stakes, when every time he wins he reproaches himself for not having staked higher."

"So you lost?"

"I'm cleaned out. I don't believe there is eight pounds in my purse."

"Humph! I came to borrow."

"I'll accept a bill, if you will get it discounted, and we'll share."

"Bravo!"

"Have you a stamp about you?"

"Have I?—My dear Cis, what a question! Why bill-stamps are my stock in trade; when the day—distant yet, I hope—shall arrive that is to find me without a stamp, and without a friend to go through the matter of form, then will Francis Forrester gracefully bid adieu to this dung-heap of civilization, and waft his charming person into other regions. Here you are, old fellow! just scrawl your name across that: your coachmaker will discount it."

Having settled this little matter of business, Cecil drove to Hester's.

CHAPTER XII.

HESTER'S LOVE.

To meet her spirit in a nimble kiss.
Distilling panting ardor to her breast.
JOHN MARSTON.—*The Malcontent.*

S'il ose m'alléguer une odieuse loi
Quand je fais tout pour lui, s'il ne fait rien pour moi;
Dès le moment, sans songer si je l'aime,
Sans consulter enfin si je me perds moi meme
J'abandonne l'ingrat.
RACINE.—*Bajazet.*

CECIL found Hester writing, in a charming *négligé*. She threw down her pen with a movement of impatient joy as he entered.

She took his outstretched hand in hers, and pressing it tenderly, looked with serious alarm into his face, as she said, "You are not well. Something is on your mind. Am I right?"

"You are."

"Sit down on the sofa—there." She sat by his side still holding his hand, which he could not withdraw, "Now, tell me what it is."

He shook his head.

"Won't you make me your confidante? Am I not worthy to share your sorrows!"

"Don't ask me—you are right—I *am* unhappy. But I can not tell you wherefore."

"How is your novel getting on? Why won't you tell me?" She pressed his hand as she said it.

He was perplexed, and knew not what to say. Her dark eyes were darting forth fire—her face was so close to his that he felt its warmth—her loose morning dress, thrown slighily open by the attitude in which she sat bent forward, made a dangerous display of her finely molded bust; he was surrounded with such an atmosphere of voluptuousness, that his intoxicated senses confused his reason. In that moment he forgot every thing but the moment's intense sensation. His eyes answered hers; his hand returned her pressure; he drank her breath, and felt the blood flushing his face.

Both were silent; both feared to break that silence. With irresistible impulse they mutually bent forward till their lips touched, and then clung together in a burning kiss.

She burst into tears, and pressed him feverishly to her, as if in an embrace to express the unutterable fervor of her love. And in this delirium they remained some time, not a word passing, only a few deep sighs, and a fierce pressure of the hand, telling of the fire which consumed them.

Hester was supremely happy. Her doubts were set at rest. He loved her!

Cecil was violently excited, and in his excitement forgot whom he was embracing—forgot his wife—forgot the world. The vague suggestions of his conscience were stilled at once by the agitation of his senses. Hester by a word recalled him to himself.

"You love me, then!" she said, tenderly.

He started, and could not answer her.

"Cecil, dearest Cecil, my own, my best beloved!"

He was sobered in an instant.

But what could he do? To continue this scene was impossible; yet to undeceive her, to tell her that he loved her not! what man could do that?

"Why are you so silent?"

"I suffer horribly."

"From what?"

He beat his brow distractedly.

"Hester—you will curse me.—It is not my fault.—You—"

"Do you not love me?" she almost shrieked.

"I do, I do!" he hurriedly exclaimed; "yes, Hester, I love you—but—how shall I tell it you?—We must forget this—we must meet no more."

"Not meet, when you love me? Impossible! The whole world shall not separate us."

"It is the world which will separate us."

"What—your wife!" she said scornfully, almost savagely.

"Alas!"

"I recognize no barrier in a wife. I scorn the whole system of marriage. It is iniquitous! Two hearts that love, to be separated by a sophism of convention! If you love *her*, keep to her. If you love *me*, you are mine." Hester rose from the sofa as she spoke: her whole frame trembled with passion.

Cecil remained seated; his eyes fixed on the ground, in a helpless state of irresolution.

"Cecil, one word—and but one. Are you afraid of the idle gossip of the world, and are your instincts cowed at it?"

"Hester! I feel, Hester, we must part forever."

"Then you love me not?"

He did not answer.

A loud knocking at the street door startled them. She ran to the window, and looked out.

"It is Sir Chetsom. Cecil, this instant must decide my fate. Do you reject my love?"

"Believe me, this is a situation—"

"*He* is coming up stairs. One word—yes, or no?"

He twirled his hat, and sought for an expression which should soften the blow, but could find none. She looked at him with intense eagerness, and reading in his hesitation her worst fears, gave a low, heart-breaking sob, and rushed into the other room. In a few seconds the door opened, and the servant announced—

"Sir Chetsom Chetsom."

Cecil brushed past him with a hurried bow, and made a precipitate retreat.

"What the devil is all this?" muttered the astonished baronet. "Hester not here!"

Hester's maid appeared, and informed him that her mistress would be down immediately, if he would only be good enough to wait.

"Where is your mistress, then?"

"In her dressing room, Sir Chetsom."

Without saying another word, Sir Chetsom, to the horror of the maid, recovered the speed of his youth to ascend the stairs, and to rush into the dressing-room. On all ordinary occasions he preserved *les convenances* with great punctilio; but he was at this moment in an exasperation of jealousy, and only thought of clearing up his doubts. Cecil's exit, and Hester's absence, were alone startling circumstances; but when to these he added the jealousy which for a long time Sir Chetsom had felt toward Cecil, his exasperation may be conceived.

He found Hester extended on a couch, bathed in tears. She rose angrily at his approach, and with a gesture of great dignity pointed to the door. As he seemed noways disposed to obey her, she said—

"I would be alone—alone, Sir Chetsom."

"My dear Hester, what is all this? In tears! what has distressed you?"

Her only answer was to pass into her bedroom, and lock herself in.

Sir Chetsom felt foolish. He tapped at the door; but she gave no answer.

He threatened to break it open; but she remained silent.

He than began to wheedle and entreat, to threaten, to promise, to storm, and to implore, alternately. All in vain: not a word could he extort from her.

He went down into the drawing-room, there to await her pleasure; sulky and suspicious, angry yet anxious.

Hester, meanwhile, gave full scope to the paroxysm of her grief. In Cecil's manner she had read her condemnation. She understood his momentary aberration. She saw that, although he had not been able to withstand the excitement of that moment, yet it was not his heart, but his senses she had captivated. She saw that he loved his wife!

Fierce were the convulsions into which this conviction threw her, and many were the tears she shed; but after an hour's misery, she grew calmer, and began to think of her condition.

Sir Chetsom was below, awaiting her. He was jealous; he was angry. He was ready to quarrel with her, and she felt that a good quarrel was just the thing she wanted.

Prepared, therefore, for a "scene," she descended into the drawing-room.

"Oh! at last," said Sir Chetsom, coldly.

"Yes, Sir Chetsom, at last. I presume I may choose my own time for seeing my visitors; those who do me the honor of calling upon me will be pleased to accept that condition, or else be pleased to stay away."

"Indeed, madam!" replied he, greatly astonished at her tone, and foreseeing that she was ready to burst forth at a word.

"So it is, Sir Chetsom. In which class am I to place you?"

"Hester, I don't understand this language."

"Then I will say good-morning. I dislike talking to those who do not comprehend me."

She rose and moved toward the door.

"Hester! Hester!"

She turned round again,

"Stay a moment.—Sit down again. There, now, let us talk over matters quietly."

"Begin. What have you to say?"

"I found you in tears just now."

"You did; what then!"

She said this so angrily, that he was forced to pause a moment, and change his tone to say—

"I wish—as a friend—my love prompts me to ask the cause of those tears?"

"Wretchedness!"

"You wretched!"

"Intensely!"

"My poor Hester! What has occurred?—Is Mr. Chamberlayne—has he any thing to do with it?"

She made no reply.

"Answer me, dear girl. Do. I have a right to know."

She continued silent.

"I insist upon knowing."

"Insist, then," she replied, quietly.

"I *do* insist!" he said, raising his voice.

"But your insistance is useless."

"Eh? Hester, do not go too far.—Remember—"

"What? *What* am I to remember?"

"That you—that I may enforce—"

An ironical smile was her answer.

"Hester, you forget.—I am here as your protector—you owe every thing to me. Be careful. I am willing to overlook a great deal—"

"Are you willing to quit the room?" she said, her eyes flashing as she spoke. "There is the door. May you never enter it again! Go! I command you! *You* insist—*you* enforce? And do you imagine that I am to give up my youth and beauty to age and folly—that I am to sacrifice myself, and to such as you, and then to be told that *you* insist! Undeceive yourself, Sir Chetsom. I am my own mistress. I follow my own caprices. My caprice once was to live with you. Now my caprice is to show you the door. Go! I owe you nothing. I have not sold myself. I have not bound myself. Go!—Why do you stand there gaping at me—do you not comprehend my words? or do you fancy that it is something so strange I should wish never to see you again? You imagine, perhaps, that I am not calm now, that I am unaware of what I do in relinquishing the protection of Sir Chetsom Chetsom? Undeceive yourself. If I am angry, I know perfectly what I do. I know the *extent* of my folly—shall I tell you what it is? It is that I ever listened to you! It is that I ever sullied my name by accepting your protection! *Now*, do you understand me?"

She sank in a chair, exhausted. Poor Sir Chetsom was troubled and confused. The scorn of her manner, which lent such momentum to her words, quite crushed the feelings of anger which continually rose within him. She had often threatened to quit him; but never in such terms, and never seemed so earnest.

"My dear Hester," he said, submissively, taking a seat near her, "you have misunderstood me."

"I do not wish to understand you, then."

"But are you serious—do you wish to leave me?"

"Very serious."

"But what have I done? I am sure my life is spent in trying to make you happy. Every wish of yours, as soon as it is expressed, I endeavor to gratify."

"Then my wish is never to see you again; gratify that!"

"My dear Hester, be reasonable. You are angry now—I don't know wherefore—I won't inquire, if it displeases you—but you will get over this; to-morrow, you will have forgotten it. To-morrow I will come and see you."

"I will *not* see you; so spare yourself the trouble."

"Not see me! Is every thing over, then, between us? Is this your calm decision?"

"It is. I have told you so before. What makes you doubt it? Do you suppose your society is so fascinating that I can not relinquish it? Try me."

"I will," said Sir Chetsom, buttoning his coat, and rising in concentrated anger.

"Do so."

"You will repent this. You force me to it, recollect! You force me!"

"Good morning."

"I am not joking, I am serious now."

"Good morning."

"If I once quit this house it will be never to return."

"Sir Chetsom, I have the pleasure of wishing you *good morning!*"

There was no replying to the cutting coolness of her manner. He took up his hat, buttoned his coat up to the chin, fidgeted his gloves, and at last, making an effort, said—

"Very well, very well!" and immediately left the room.

Hester felt considerably relieved. She had taken a savage pleasure in this contest, and utterly reckless of consequences, found in that very recklessness a satisfaction, which helped to console her mortified vanity and wounded affection. Toward Cecil she felt hate and scorn: toward Sir Chetsom, contemptuous anger, she knew not why. She had played her whole existence in that quarrel, and knew that she was a beggar, without a moment's anxiety.

The next day, Sir Chetsom sent her a note, in which he deplored what had passed between them, but was willing to attribute it to some extraordinary irritation; and he moreover offered to settle six hundred a year upon her for her life, if she would only consent to remain his friend, as heretofore.

The irritation in Hester's mind had not abated, and she returned this laconic answer:

"CADOGAN PLACE, 13*th June*, 1841.

"Not for six thousand.

"H. M."

Sir Chetsom was alarmed. The idea of her quitting him was more than he could endure. Completely fascinated by her, the more he knew of her, the more hopelessly he became her slave. He could not imagine living without her.

He called; was refused admittance; called again; was refused again; wrote, and received back his letter unopened.

He was in despair. So great was his preoccupation, that he actually went out with his whiskers unoiled and undyed! Hester's servant at length took pity on his sorrow, and consented to let him enter the house, against her orders.

He stole up to her boudoir, and throwing himself at her feet, said—

"Hester, I can not exist without you."

"But I can without you," she said, smiling.

"You smile; then I am forgiven."

"Yes; but I keep to my resolution."

"Hester, hear me out; if, after what I have to say, you still keep your resolution, I shall have nothing to do but to leave you in peace. Here, then, I offer you my hand—be Lady Chetsom, and make me happy."

At that moment a strange image rose in Hester's mind. She had that afternoon met Cecil driving in the Park. He raised his hat in cold politeness, but made no attempt to speak to her. The recollection of this scene now presented itself, as the sort of back-ground

to Sir Chetsom on his knees offering a title, offering wealth, offering consideration to the friendless, forsaken, ambitious girl.

"Will you accept me?" again whispered Sir Chetsom.

"I shall plague your life out," she said.

"Then that is a settled matter!"

Sir Chetsom was the happiest of men.

But his happiness only lasted a fortnight, and was then suddenly cut short by that inflexible lady—Atropos. Driving home one evening, his horse shied at something in the road, and ran away with him down Constitution Hill, then stumbled and threw Sir Chetsom against the railings. A concussion of the brain was the consequence.

By this accident, Hester not only lost the honor of becoming Lady Chetsom, but she was absolutely left penniless, as Sir Chetsom died intestate.

To this had her ambition brought her! With no resources, with no *friends*, without even a good name, she had to begin the world anew. Literature was the desperate resource which alone awaited her; and she resolved to live by her pen.

BOOK VII.

CHAPTER I.

GEORGE MAXWELL.

Pietro.—"This Mnievole is one of the most prodigious affectations that ever conversed with nature. A man or rather a monster: more discontent than Lucifer, when he was thrust out of the presence. His appetite is as insatiable as the grave: as far from any content as from heaven."

JOHN MARSTON.—*The Malcontent.*

MRS. MEREDITH VYNER was radiant again; if not happy, she was at least sprightly, occupied, and flattered. She had not forgotten Marmaduke, she had not forgiven him; but although his image sometimes lowered upon her, she banished it with a smile of triumph, for she was loved!

The silent, shy, and saturnine George Maxwell had taken Marmaduke's place, as *cavalier servente*; and across his dark, forbidding face there shone a gleam of sunshine, as he now watched the sylph-like enchantress, who for so long had made him more and more misanthropical by her gay indifference to him, and who at last had perceived his love.

Marmaduke, his hated, favored rival, was dismissed; and not only was a rival dismissed, but he, George, was admitted in his place.

The history of these two may be told in a few words. Maxwell, silent and watchful so long as Marmaduke was a visitor at the house, suddenly became more talkative and demonstrative when he found Marmaduke's visits cease. Hopes rose within him. He spoke with another accent, and with other looks to Mrs. Vyner. She was not long in understanding him. Once opening her eyes to his love, she saw as in a flash of light, the whole history of his passion, she understood the conduct of the silent, jealous lover, and deeply flattered at such constancy and unencouraged affection, began to turn a favorable eye upon him. Smarting herself from wounded affection, she could the more readily and truly sympathize with him. In a few weeks—for passion grows with strange rapidity, and days are epochs in its history—she gave him to understand that he was not *indifferent* to her. Of Marmaduke she spoke freely to him, telling him the same story she had told her husband, and he believed her: what will not lovers believe!

No word of love as yet had passed their lips, and yet they understood each other. Indeed, so plain was the avowal of her looks, that a man less shy and suspicious than Maxwell would long ago have declared his passion, certain of a return. But he was withheld by the very fierceness of his passion, and by his horror at ridicule. Maxwell was one of those men who never enter the water till they can swim—who never undertake any thing till they are certain of succeeding, held back by the fear of failure. One trait in his character will set this disposition clearly forth: he had a fine tenor voice and sang with some mastery, but he never could be prevailed upon to sing before any one, except his own family, because he was waiting till he could execute as well as Rubini or Mario. Meanwhile he was intensely jealous of those who, not having reached that standard, did sing; and his scornful criticisms on their curious presumption, was nothing but miserable spite at their not having so sensitive a vanity as his own.

Maxwell was in truth a bad, mean-spirited, envious, passionate man, in whom vanity, ludicrously susceptible and exacting, fostered the worst of passions, jealousy and revenge. He was misanthropical: not because his own high-thoughted soul turned from the pettiness of mankind with intolerant disgust—not because he had pryed too curiously into the corruptions of human nature, without at the same time having been fortunate enough to know familiarly all that is great, and loving, and noble in the human heart—but simply because his life was a perpetual demand upon the abnegation, affection, and admiration of others, and because that demand could not in the nature of things be satisfied. It has been said that a man who affects misanthropy is a coxcomb, for real misanthropy is madness. Not always madness: seldom so; it is generally inordinate and unsatisfied vanity. A man hates his fellow creatures because they, unwittingly, are always irritating him by refusing to submit to the exactions of his vanity: he construes their neglect into insult, their indifference into envy. He envies them for succeeding where he dare not venture; he hates them for not acknowledging his own standard of himself. Maxwell was one of these.

Conceive such a man suddenly caught in the meshes of a brilliant coquette like Mrs. Meredith

Vyner! Conceive him after two years of angry expectation, during which she has never bestowed a smile on him which was not unmeaning, now awakening to the conviction that his merits are recognized, that his love is returned, that he has inspired a guilty passion!

The guilt added intensity to his joy: it was so immense a triumph!

What a pair! Love has been well said to delight in antitheses, otherwise we might stare at the contrast afforded by this little, humpbacked golden-haired, coquettish, heartless woman, and this saturnine, gloomy, stupid, bad-hearted man.

Poor Meredith Vyner could not comprehend it. The evidence of his eyes told him plainly how the case stood; but his inexperienced mind refused to accept the evidence of his senses What could she see in so grim and uninteresting an animal? Marmaduke was quite another man; affection for him was intelligible at least; but Maxwell! And what could Maxwell see in her? Why, she was the very contradiction of all he must feel in his own breast!

In that contradiction was the charm: Maxwell did himself instinctively, but involuntarily, that justice; he would assuredly have hated a duplicate of himself, even more intensely than he hated others.

Meredith Vyner endeavored once or twice to come to an "explanation" with his wife; for he was master in his own house, and would be, or he was greatly deceived. But she answered him with a few galling sarcasms (adding general allusions to the miseries of young wives subject to the absurd jealousies, of foolish old men), and ending in—hysterics! There was no combating hysteries, and Vyner was always defeated.

CHAPTER II.

ROSE AGAIN SEES JULIUS.

Mrs. Vyner again went into society as usual, the only difference being that she was generally accompanied by Maxwell instead of her husband. Rose often staid at home, but sometimes went with her. Time had not made her forget Julius St. John, but it had brought back the elasticity of her spirits; and except an occasional sigh of regret, or a short reverie, she was much the same as she had been before.

One Saturday on which they went to Dr. Whiston's soirée, Rose accompanied them, and was delighted to see Cecil there in high spirits, and beautifully dressed. Blanche's condition of course prevented her being there.

"But she is quite well, is she not?"

"Charming, and looks lovelier than ever."

"I have not been to see her this week. Mamma has not been able to let me have the carriage. How gets on your new picture?"

"Famously. How beautiful you are looking to-night, Rose!"

"Of course I am, do I ever fail! But tell me, what is the subject of your picture?"

He put his finger on his lips.

"That's a secret. I let none know any thing about it, as I intend surprising you all."

"Papa is so proud of you now, that I think if you were to go to him, all would be made up."

"That's kind, certainly; now I no longer need him, he is willing to acknowledge his son-in-law. No, Rosy, no; I have made advances enough; *he* must make them now."

"But think how delightful it would be for us all!"

"I know that; besides, I know it *must* come. He will make the first advance; and he *shall* make it."

The secret of Cecil's holding back was not pride, but calculation. He fancied that if Vyner made the first advances to him, he could *make terms;* and his recent losses at the gaming-table had made him sensible of the precariousness of his present resources.

As they moved through the crowd, and were passing into the second room, they came face to face with Mrs. St. John and Julius.

There was no avoiding a recognition. Rose blushed deeply, and felt extremely embarrassed; but recovering herself, she held out her hand to Mrs. St. John, who took it coldly.

Cecil and Julius shook hands cordially.

"Have you long been returned?" asked Rose in a low voice.

"Six weeks," was the laconic reply. "I hope Mr. Vyner is quite well, and Mrs. Vyner?"

"Mamma is here—in the other room," she said, with an effort.

She made a movement as if to pass on; her eye met Julius's as she bowed, but his face, though deadly pale, gave no sign of agitation.

In another instant, they were in the next room; and Rose, with well acted indifference, occupied herself with the specimens exhibited on the table, addressing common-place remarks to Cecil, much to his astonishment.

"Is it all over, then, Rose?" he said.

"All. Oh, do look at this machine for teaching the blind to write—how very curious."

"Are you serious, Rose?"

"Serious! Didn't you see the cut direct?"

"You take it calmly!"

"Would you have a scene? Shall I faint? Shall I pretend to be stabbed to the heart? Shall I act a part?"

"Pretend! Are you not acting now?"

"Not I. If you think their reception has pained me, pray undeceive yourself; it is no more than I expected. Months ago I made up my mind. I know what to think of *him*. I am glad he has behaved so; very glad, very glad. It now puts every thing beyond a doubt. Very glad."

She muttered "very glad" to herself as she sat down in a chair just left by a dowager, and tried to cheat herself into the belief that she really was glad. In truth, she was at that moment more indignant than unhappy. The coldness of her reception, both by mother and son, had exasperated her. Had he looked pleased to see her, had he even looked very pained, she would have at once given him to understand that his retreat had been precipitate, and that she was ready to accept him with delight. But his coldness piqued her; she refrained from addressing a word to him; and was now indulging in somewhat bitter reflections on his conduct.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Vyner had been eloquent in her admiration of Cecil and his genius, to Lady F——, with whom she was talking. Maxwell,

from time to time, threw in a sarcasm, and was evidently uneasy at hearing any one praised so highly

"Well, but you know, my dear sir," said Lady F——, "he must be monstrous clever, or he would never make so much money."

Maxwell shrugged his shoulders, and said, with considerable significance in the tone—

"That depends upon how he makes it."

Mrs. Vyner looked at him, surprised. A little while afterward, when they were standing retired apart from the company, she asked him what he meant by his reply to Lady F——, respecting Cecil's money-making.

"I mean this: he doesn't make money by his *genius*," Maxwell replied, with sneering emphasis.

"By what, then?"

Maxwell refused at first to answer.

"What can you be hinting at? By what means does he make his money?"

"By—there, I may as well tell you; you must soon hear it—by gambling."

A shudder of disgust ran over her frame.

"Are you sure—quite sure of this?"

"Quite: I had it from a man who plays nightly at the same table with him."

"How horrible! isn't it?"

"No," he replied, with a sardonic smile: "it's *genius*."

She looked at him astonished: at that moment, she hated him. Well would it have been for her if she had taken the warning of that moment, and flung from her the viper that was crawling to her heart. But she forgot it. Maxwell's smile passed away, and was replaced by one of tenderness for her.

Rose and her mother were both thoughtful as they rode home that night.

The next day, Rose communicated to her father what Cecil had said at Dr. Whiston's, and begged him to write to Cecil, and announce his forgiveness. Vyner, who would have been well pleased to do so, spoke with his wife about it.

"He is a credit to us now," added Vyner.

"Oh! yes, a *great* credit."

"Don't you think so?"

"How should I not? Vyner is an old name—a good name—it can gain no fresh *eclat* from honors, but it may from infamy."

"From infamy, Mary?"

"Cecil Chamberlayne, your creditable son-in-law, is a gambler."

"Good heavens!"

"His cab and tiger, his dinners, his trinkets—all come from that infamous source: it is his means of livelihood."

"My poor, poor Blanche!" exclaimed the wretched father, as the tears came into his eyes. "But she shall not stay with him—I will take her away. She shall come to us—she shall."

In vain his wife interposed; he ordered the carriage, and drove at once to Cecil's house.

CHAPTER III.

WOMAN'S LOVE.

Blanche was trimming a baby cap, when her father entered the room. With a cry of delight she sprang up and rushed into his arms. He hugged her fondly, and the tears rolled down his cheeks as he pressed his child sadly to his bosom.

It was some time before either of them spoke.

"My poor child!" he said at last.

"Your happy child, papa; I am *so* happy! I knew you would forgive me soon. Oh! why is not Cecil here to join with me in gratitude?"

"Blanche," he said, with an effort, "I am come to take you away with me: will you come?"

She looked her answer.

"That is right—that is right. Pack up your things, then, at once."

"Pack up what things?" she asked in astonishment.

"Whatever you want to take with you. Come—don't stay in this house a moment longer than you can help."

Her astonishment increased.

"Do you mean me to leave my home?"

"Yes."

"And my husband?"

"Yes."

"Leave my husband?—leave my Cecil? Why, papa, what can have put that into your head? Do you suppose, I am not happy here?—He is the best of husbands!"

Meredith Vyner had recourse to his snuff-box, as in all emergencies. He inserted thumb and index finger into it, and trifled mechanically with the grains, while seeking for some argument.

"Do, dear papa, relieve me from this suspense.—What is it you mean?"

"Are you serious, Blanche?—*is* he a good husband?"

"I adore him; he is the kindest creature on earth."

Vyner took a huge pinch. That did not clear his ideas, and he sat silently brushing off the grains which had congregated in the wrinkles of his waistcoat, very much puzzled what to say.

"Papa, there is something on your mind. If it is any thing against Cecil—any thing a wife ought not to hear, spare me, and do not utter it. If it is any thing else, spare me the suspense, and tell me at once what it is."

"Blanche, my dearest child, I came here to save you from ruin, and I will save you. You must quit your husband."

"Why?"

"Is not my word sufficient? I say you *must*. Your welfare depends upon it."

"Why?—I say again—why?"

"Are you—no, you can not be aware of *how* your husband gains a livelihood."

She colored violently and trembled. He noticed it, and read the avowal in her agitation.

"You *do* know it, then?"

She burst into tears.

"Well, my dear child, since you know it, that saves me an unpleasant explanation. But you must leave him; you can not stay here longer: you can not share his infamy; you shall not be dragged into his ruin. It has been a miserable match; I have always grieved over it; always knew it would end wretchedly.

But to come to this!—to this! No, Blanche, you can not remain here. Come and live at home; there at least you will not live in infamy."

She wept bitterly, but offered no remark.

"Come Blanche," he said, taking her hand, "you will leave this place, will you not? You will live with us. I can not promise to make you happy, but at least I can save you from the wretched existence of a gambler's wife. Come—come."

"I can not!" she sobbed.

"Rouse yourself: conquer this emotion. Think of your future—think of your child!"

She shuddered.

"Think of the child you are to bring into the world. Must it also share in the ruin which its father will inevitably draw upon you? My dear Blanche, you must have courage; for your own sake—for your child's sake—you must quit this house. Come home to me. I am unhappy myself; I want to have some one about me I can love: Rose is the only one: Violet is away: your mother—but don't let me speak of her You see Blanche, dear, I want you; you will fill a place at home; you will be so petted; and the little one will have every comfort—and his aunt Rose—but don't sob so, my child; do restrain yourself. You will come, eh?"

"I can not!"

Vyner took another pinch of snuff, and was disconcerted; there was such wretchedness, but such resolution in her tone, that he felt his arguments had been powerless.

Her sobs were pitiful to hear, and his own eyes were filled with tears, in spite of his rising anger at what he considered her obstinacy.

"Why can you not?"

"Because he is my husband—one whom I have chosen for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, to cherish, and to obey, till death do us part—one from whom death alone shall part me, for I love him, he loves me, and by his side I can smilingly await poverty, even ruin."

"Even infamy!" exclaimed Vyner.

"Even infamy!" she replied, in a low, sad tone.

"This is madness."

"It is love—it is duty. I know the wretched fate which must befall us. I foresee it: but if it had already fallen, I should say the same. I can not leave him! I may be miserable; we may be brought to beggary: my child may want every necessary—oh! I have not shut my eyes to that terrible prospect! I have seen it; it has wrung my heart, but I can not—would not, if I could—leave him who is all my happiness. Cecil is more than my husband; he is all that I hold dearest in life: he is the father of that child whose future you so gloomily foresee; shall that child—shall my child not smile upon its father? You do not know what you ask."

"I ask you to be happy."

"I am so. Without Cecil I could not be so. Let misfortune come to me in any shape, so that it rob me not of him, and I can bear it; only not that—only not that!"

"Bless you for those words, my own beloved!" said a voice which made them both start and look up.

Cecil stood before them. He had overheard the greater part of their conversation, and had opened the door without their noticing it, absorbed as they were in their own emotions.

Vyner took three rapid pinches, and felt greatly confused. Blanche threw herself into her husband's arms, and sobbed aloud.

"Bless you, my own Blanche, for the unshaken depth of your love. It shall not be thrown away. I will no longer be unworthy of it. I have been a villain—yes, sir, I confess I have been a weak and selfish villain; seduced by my necessities, and by vile temptations, I have nearly brought this dear girl to ruin. But this morning has saved me. I have seen the peril—I will—hear me, sir, solemnly swear, by all that is sacred—by all my hopes of happiness—by this dear head now resting on my heart—I swear never again, on any pretext, to touch a card—to enter a house of play! Will you believe me? You hear my oath—a gentleman's word ought to be sufficient, but you have my oath—will you believe it?"

Blanche pressed him convulsively to her, and laughed hysterically in her joy.

Vyner rose, and taking Cecil's hand, said—

"Chamberlayne, you are a man of honor; I respect you. What you have now done effaces the past. We are reconciled. I will assure you two hundred pounds a year during my life, which, with your own income, will suffice, I hope, to keep you in decent comfort, and will enable you to employ your talents honorably, and, I hope, profitably. My house is open to you. We are reconciled, are we not?"

Cecil pressed his hand warmly.

"I have been angry with you," Vyner continued, "but my anger is gone. What says our favorite?

> Non Dindymene, non adytis quatit
> Mentem sacerdotum incola Pythius
> Non Liber æque, non acuta
> Si geminant Corybantes æra
> Tristes ut iræ—

Eh? is it not so? The past, then, is forgotten?"

"Oh, sir," said Cecil, wiping away a tear, "I do not deserve such kindness. I have been a wretch; but my future conduct shall thank you—I can not now!"

"All I ask is—make Blanche happy."

Cecil looked down upon her upturned face, and met her loving glance with a look of unutterable tenderness; then drawing her head to him, he pressed his lips upon her eyes; she threw her arms around him, and exclaimed—

"How can I help being happy with him?"

Much affected by this scene, Vyner again pressed Cecil's hand with great warmth, kissed his child, wiped his eyes, and withdrew; for his heart was full.

CHAPTER IV.

A BEAM OF SUNSHINE IN THE HOUSE.

Cecil was very earnest in his repentance, and sincerely meant to keep the oath he pledged. He at once sold his cab and horse; discharged his tiger; reduced his expenses in every practicable way; paid the great bulk of his debts; ceased to visit the club; ordered

the servant to deny him to Frank Forrester, whenever that worthy called; and was assiduous at his painting.

Having thus shut himself out from temptation, and begun again the career of an honorable man, he ought once more to have been happy. He was so for a few days; Blanche's recovered gayety, and her grateful fondness made him bless the change. But the excitement soon wore off; and in getting into the broad, monotonous rut of daily life, he began to miss the variety and excitement of his former pursuits.

He could not work with pleasure: he had lost all the "delight" which "physics pain." Work to him was drudgery, and it was no more. His spirits became low. From Blanche he hid the change as well as he could; but he could not hide it from himself. He would stand for half an hour before his easel, absorbed in reveries, and not once putting pencil to the canvas. He would sit for hours in an easy-chair, smoking, or affecting to read, but his mind incessantly occupied playing imaginary games at *rouge et noir*, in which he was invariably a winner.

There is this excuse for the gambler: the temptation besets him in a more powerful shape than almost any other temptation to which man is exposed. Imagination, stimulated by cupidity, is treacherously active. The games being games of chance, imagination plays them not only with alarming distinctness, but with most delusive success. Heaps of gold glitter before the infatuated dreamer; and although he rouses himself with a sigh to find that he has only been dreaming, yet the dream has had the vividness of reality to him. Many and many an unhappy wight has started up from such dreams, goaded with a sense of their reality, and persuaded that, if he only play the game as he has just played it in imagination, he must infallibly win, has pawned his last remnant, or robbed his employers, to rush to the gaming-table, and venture every thing on the strength of that conviction. Ruined, perhaps dishonored, people have exclaimed, "The wretch!" or "The scoundrel!" and have been stern in their indignant condemnation of his pitiable folly. But little do they know to what fearful temptations he has succumbed; little do they know the *fascination* of the gaming-table to one who has played much, and whose hours have been crowded with imaginary games, in which he has been eminently successful.

I do not defend the gambler: God forbid! I am merely endeavoring to present a psychological explanation of the very common phenomenon, which people generally regard as produced only by some innate wickedness. The gambler knows the folly of his act—no one so well! He knows that the bank *must* win, and in his cooler moments will demonstrate the matter clearly to you. But then comes this seductive imagination, like a siren, picturing to him gorgeous realities: he is dazzled, fascinated, and succumbs.

To resist imagination, to trample down temptation, a man needs strength of will; but this is precisely the quality men are most deficient in; and here, as almost everywhere, we find that vice is not, as Plato says, ignorance, but weakness.

Cecil held out manfully against temptation, and every one believed him cured. No one knew what was constantly passing in his mind, or they would not have been so secure.

Meanwhile Blanche had passed safely through her blissful trial, and a little girl was nestled at her side. The joy and rapture of the happy parents, the delight of Rose, the pride of Vyner, and the supreme indifference of Mrs. Vyner, may well be conceived. Little Rose Blanche—that was her name—was more welcomed and more caressed than if she had come into the world to preserve great estates from passing into other hands; and how she escaped being killed by the excess of attention and variety of advice, is only another illustration of the mysterious escapes of infancy—a period when it would seem some good genii must be always on the alert to prevent the ever imminent catastrophe. There is said to be a special god who looks after drunkards, and preserves them in their helpless state; but what are the perils of a drunkard to the perils of an infant surrounded with nurses, relations, and female friends!

Rose Blanche throve, however, and grew into a dimply, rosy babe enough, incomparably more beautiful than any other babe ever seen, as mother, father, nurse, and aunt incessantly testified. It did squall a little, to be sure, and Cecil, who had irritable nerves, could not be brought to consider that musical. But men! what do they know of babies?

My dear madam, answer me frankly, did you ever know a man who was worth listening to on that subject? Did you ever meet with one whose head was not crammed with absurd notions thereupon? Is not your husband, in particular, characterized by the most preposterous incapacity—is he not fidgety, crotchety, absurd? I knew it.

Let me not, therefore, admit one word of Cecil's respecting Rose Blanche, who promised to have more beauty, intelligence, and heart, than any other infant then sprawling in long clothes, or then looking with profound, impenetrable calmness upon the wondrous universe to which it had been so recently introduced.

A beam of sunshine had been let into the existence of Blanche and Cecil—a beam which, stretching far out into the future, gilded the distant horizon, so that they, and all, pronounced great happiness in store for them. The exquisite expression of maternal love made Blanche incomparably beautiful; and Cecil, as he watched her gazing downward on the infant at her breast in that deep stillness of seraphic love—whose calm intensity Raphael alone has succeeded in portraying—would bend forward and press his lips upon her forehead, chastened, purified, and exalted. In those moments he was another man; ennui fled, discouragement was conquered, and the cards were not before his mind's eye.

CHAPTER V.

VIOLET TO MARMADUKE.

Learn, by a mortal yearning, to ascend—
Seeking a higher object. Love was given,

Encouraged, sanctioned, chiefly for that end:
For this the passion to excess was driven,
That self might be annulled:—her bondage prove
The fetters of a dream, opposed to love.
WORDSWORTH.—*Laodamia.*

DEAREST MARMADUKE,

I MUST write to you. I have been on the point of doing so often, very often, and now I learn from Rose that you have written to ask her if she could send you news of my health from time to time. Thank you, Marmaduke, thank you for the delicacy which has dictated your respect for my resolution—thank you for not having attempted to discover my retreat. You see I disclose it to you now—I am with my kind old uncle—I let you know it, confiding in your not abusing the knowledge and attempting to see me. We can not meet. I could not endure it. But we can write. Your letters will be a solace to me; to write to you will be an exquisite pleasure. Yes, Marmaduke, I long to pour out my soul to you; I long to tell you all I think, all I do; and you will tell me what you think, and what you do, will you not? There is no issue from our fate; we must bear it, but we shall bear it with less murmuring if we can speak to each other without reserve.

My health, you will be glad to learn, is good. Exercise keeps up my strength, in spite of what I have suffered. I am almost all day on horseback with my uncle, and that keeps me strong. Shot is of course my inseparable companion; the dearest beast sympathizes with me, I am sure; and sometimes when I sit still, my soul carried away in some sad reverie, I see his intelligent eyes fixed inquiringly on my face, and then I say "Where is Marmaduke?" and he pricks his ears, wags his tail, and runs to the door to listen if indeed you are coming; disappointed, he returns to his place to look sadly at me, as if he knew that your presence alone would bring the smile again upon my face.

I am much calmer than I was. Renewed health has doubtless a great deal to do with it, for misery is but malady; the healthy are not long unhappy. I now resign myself to the inevitable, and no longer beat my distracted wings against my cage. Happy, I am not, and can not hope to be; but I am calm, and in my calmness it seems to me that the privilege of writing to you, and of knowing that you think of me, is a privilege which the happiest might envy.

I read much. Tell me what books you are reading that I may read them too, and so be with you in spirit, even in your studies. Mind you obey me in this particular, and tell me *all* the books you read. Do not be afraid of frightening me by the dryness of the subject. I have been a miscellaneous and unwomanly reader. Papa's and uncle's libraries have always been at my disposal, and although I have studied no one subject, and am consequently very, very ignorant, yet in my unrestrained liberty I have read all sorts of books, from treatises of philosophy to novels. You know papa made us all learn a little Latin, that he might explain Horace to us; so that I have got a tincture of learning, just enough to make men's books intelligible, and not enough to make me a blue.

Therefore, let me read what you read; I shall, perhaps, understand a serious book all the better from knowing that you have understood it; for I want my mind to be as little below your level as culture can make it.

Describe to me your daily habits and avocations. Rose tells me that you are seen nowhere; that you have ceased to visit all your old friends. What replaces them?

I do not ask you if you think of me. I know you do. My own heart tells me so. I know your character; with all its manly strength, it has womanly tenderness in it, like the honey Samson found in the lion's mouth; and that tenderness is my guarantee that I am not forgotten; that, although separated by an insuperable barrier, we are not less united in heart. You will not cease to love me because I can not be yours; you will not love me less because I am forced to deny you. No, Marmaduke, love such as yours is not selfish: it is something higher than self, and I will not pay you the ill compliment of doubting it. Could I do so, I should be selfish enough to appeal to your feelings, to intreat you to love me ever, and not to think of another. I should be jealous could I doubt you—but I can not doubt.

God bless you Marmaduke, may you be happy! Write to me soon; and write only of yourself. VIOLET.

CHAPTER VI.

BRIGHTER SCENES.

You o'erjoyed spirits, wipe your long-wet eyes!
JOHN MARSTON.—*The Malcontent.*

THERE was a charming ball at Mrs. Langley Turner's. The rooms were full without being crowded, and the company was brilliant; rank, beauty, and talent, gave their *éclat* to the scene.

Mrs. Meredith Vyner and Rose were there; George Maxwell, of course, and, to Rose's extreme delight, Julius St. John. She was at first annoyed at recognizing him, but her second thoughts showed her that the present was an excellent opportunity for exhibiting her indifference. She was, accordingly, in high spirits, or seemed to be so; accepted the homage paid her with saucy coquetry; danced, talked, and laughed, as if her heart were as light as innocence could make it. A careless bow had been her only salute of Julius, and she passed by him several times without affecting *not* to observe him.

She noticed that he had grown thinner and paler. His face had grown more thoughtful, but his demeanor was perfectly calm.

Late in the evening, Rose was examining the flowers, and thinking of the handsome young guardsman who had just left her side, when she felt some one approach her. It was Julius. She resumed her inspection of the flowers.

"If you are not engaged for the next quadrille, Miss Vyner," he said, in a low, but firm tone, "may I hope for the honor?"

"I am engaged," she replied, quietly, and then moved half-way round the flower-stand, as if to discover fresh beauties.

Julius did not mistake the refusal; but he was not to be so easily discouraged.

"Are you also engaged for the quadrille after that?"

"I am."

There was less firmness in her tone; he thought it trembled.

"And—I hope I am not intrusive—and the next?"

Rose fancied that a refusal would look like fear, so she mastered her voice, and replied, with the stereotyped smile—

"I shall have much pleasure."

He bowed, and withdrew.

Rose's gayety was somewhat damped; she tried to be lively, but there was a depression on her spirits she could not shake off. It seemed as if her eyes could fix themselves nowhere but in the direction in which Julius stood.

She tried to look away, but she soon found herself again watching him.

Meanwhile Maxwell was remonstrating with Mrs. Vyner upon the little desire she exhibited to be near him, to speak to him.

"We must think of appearances," she replied; "here every action is noticed and commented on."

"But other men sit by you; you talk to them."

"Yes; as a blind. If I am seen much with you, people will begin to gossip."

"What if they do?" he brutally replied.

"What if they do! Are you indifferent to it?"

"You do not seem to be, at any rate," he said, sarcastically. 'You have grown very respectful of appearances of late. You never thought of them with Mr. Ashley.

"Because I did not care for him."

"You *looked* as if you did; you acted as if you did; and every one supposed you did."

"But they were wrong. I was not careful then, because there was no danger of my committing myself. With you, it is very different."

"So it appears."

"Now you are angry."

"I am."

"What about?"

"Your indifference."

"Foolish fellow!" she said, playfully.

"Oh, yes! it is very easy to say that; but I feel I have cause to be angry. You pretend to love me, yet you can leave me here in the room, and chatter away to any fool who pleases to accost you. One would think I was indifferent to you."

"*One* would think! *who* would? would you? What does it matter to you if the world thinks me indifferent to you?"

"It matters a great deal."

"How so?"

"Of course it does; it always matters to a man to have a charming woman care for him. People envy him his good fortune. They think more highly of him."

"And you wish to be envied?"

"I do not wish it to be supposed that I am so unattractive that no woman can care for me."

"It would please you, then, if people gossiped about us?"

"I don't say that exactly; though I don't see what harm their gossip could do us."

She fixed her gray eyes upon him with a strange expression. In an instant she read his character—its intense selfishness was revealed; and she began to doubt whether he, too, might not be playing with her, as Marmaduke had played; or worse, whether his love might not be the mere prompting of a wretched vanity, which sought her conquest as a trophy, not as a desire.

"Mr. Maxwell, we differ so entirely in our views, that it would be useless to prolong this discussion. I have only this more to say—so far from giving the world any right to gossip about me, in reference to you, it is my determination to relinquish the pleasure of your acquaintance from this time forward. When you have learned what is due to me, I may resume it; not till then."

She rose as she said this, and walked across the room to Mrs. Langley Turner, by whose side she sat down; while Maxwell gazed on her with mingled feelings of astonishment and rage—his brow darkening, his lips compressed, and every nerve within him trembling.

Mrs. Vyner was wrong in her suspicions. It was not vanity, it was jealousy which prompted his words. He suffered tortures from seeing her smile and chat with other men, and scarcely notice him. He was sincere in his wish for her to distinguish him above all the rest; not simply to gratify his vanity, but to assure him that she really loved him enough to brave every thing for him. Besides, he could not understand how her love allowed her to keep away from his side. Prudence never chilled *him*. Appearances never restrained him. He could have sat by her all the evening—every evening—it was what he most desired; and he did not understand how she could forego the same pleasure.

Maxwell was narrow-minded, even stupid; but his passions were intense; and at this moment he felt as if he could murder her. He quitted the ball in a state of deep, concentrated anger, brooding on what he considered his wrongs.

Julius came to claim Rose for the quadrille. They were silent at first, and embarrassed.

"How did you like Italy?" she said, by way of breaking the silence.

"Not at all."

"Indeed! then you are singular. I thought every one must like it. Perhaps you prefer contradiction?"

"No; I was in no frame of mind to enjoy any thing."

She trembled slightly; the *chaine des dames*, by obliging her to quit his side, prevented her speaking. When they again stood quietly beside each other, he continued—

"We went to see every thing, and the only result was, that we so tired ourselves during the day, that we slept soundly at night."

"But the pictures, the statues, the architecture, the people?"

"I saw them all; but they all wearied me."

"You were rehearsing Childe Harold, I suppose?" she said, with a feeble attempt at liveliness, which her voice belied.

"If I had been acting a part—even of misanthropy—I should have enjoyed myself; unhappily—It is your *l'été*."

She advanced, and the conversation was again interrupted. Nothing more was said during the rest of the quadrille; both were absorbed in their own thoughts.

He led her to a seat, and took another beside her. After a pause of some moments, she said—

"So you were unhappy in Italy?"

He looked earnestly into her eyes as he answered—

"Does that surprise you? Were you not already aware of it? Had I not cause?"

She blushed deeply, as she said—

"No; you had—no cause—if you had staid in England—you might have got over it."

His lower jaw fell as she concluded this phrase. She felt herself on the eve of a declaration, and by a strong effort turned it off in that way.

At this moment a partner came to carry her off for a waltz, and Julius was left to his own reflections. He reproached himself for having so far betrayed his feelings; but in truth they had been wrung from him, as from her, by the irresistible fascination of the moment.

On closer inspection it seemed to him as if there had been in her manner a tenderness and embarrassment which implied a wish for reconciliation, if not a regret for the past.

Prompted by this idea, he went up to Mrs. Vyner, and began a long conversation with her, at the termination of which he asked if he might be allowed to pay his respects to her some morning.

"Always delighted to receive you, Mr. St. John, that you must know; indeed, I should pick a quarrel with you for not having called before, but that I suppose you have some excellent excuse."

"Then to-morrow?"

"To-morrow we shall be at home."

The morrow came, and Julius, resolved at any rate not to lose Rose as *a friend* (beautiful sophistry of lovers!), was punctual in his visit. He was there before any one else. Vyner and his wife were alone in the drawing-room.

"Let Miss Vyner know that Mr. St. John is here," said Mrs. Vyner to the servant.

In a few minutes Rose came down: a volume was in her hand, and it caught the eye of her lover as soon as she appeared. She was very agitated, but shook him by the hand as if nothing particular was about to transpire. She tried to join in the conversation, but could never finish a sentence.

Mrs. Vyner left the room shortly afterward, and then Rose suddenly remembered that papa had bought a new and rare edition of Horace, which she was sure Mr. St. John would like to see.

Julius expressed enthusiastic eagerness.

Vyner thought he could lay his hand on it in a minute, and trotted away to his study for that purpose.

No sooner had he left the room than Rose, blushing and trembling, said—

"Here is a book—I meant to give it you—before you left the Hall—that night."

She could say no more. He snatched the volume from her hand: it was Leopardi. A thrill of rapture ran through his whole being; and, in a voice choked with emotion, he said—

"Rose—dearest Rose—is this—is this the answer to my—to my letter?"

"It is."

He clasped her in his arms, and, with hysterical passion, groaned, as he held her to his heart.

"Here is my treasure— Eh?" said Vyner, opening the door, and discovering the lovers in that unambiguous embrace.

"Tell him all," whispered Rose in Julius's ear, as she fled in confusion from the room.

Julius did tell all; and that very hour Vyner gave his delighted consent.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER LOVE SCENE.

Claude.—"Miserable trickster! you know that your weapon is harmless!—You have the courage of the mountebank, sir, not the bravo."

BULWER.—*Lady of Lyons.*

THAT very day a strangely different scene took place in that house.

Mrs. Vyner was in that famous boudoir before described; Maxwell was gloomily pacing it to and fro. He was there for the purpose of having an "explanation;" but he found her more than a match for him, and was now trying to beat from his stupid brain a convincing argument.

"You don't love me," he at last exclaimed.

"Have you come here to tell me that? If so, I would have you observe, that you have chosen a singularly inappropriate occasion."

"I say you don't love me," he repeated, and his eyes sparkled with malignant fire.

"Perhaps not. You don't take the way to make me love you."

This was said with such an air of quiet indifference, that he paused to look at her, as if he could read on her brow a confirmation of what she said.

"I do not love you, then!" he said, bitterly. "I have not loved you for two years—not saying a word about it—loving you in secret—seeing others more favored—seeing others looking into your face as I dared not look—suffering tortures of jealousy—I do not take the way to gain your love! what way should I then take?"

"Be amiable. Women are not captivated by scowls. George, you are unjust to me. Sit down, and listen to me calmly. Remember my position."

"You take care I shall not forget it."

"Would you, then, forget it?"

"Yes; for it keeps you from me. It is in your mouth at all times. 'My position' is your excuse for every thing."

"And is it not a valid excuse?"

"No; it is not: it is a *mere* excuse. Remember your position, indeed! why do you love another man than your husband, if your *position* forbids it?"

She looked at him in surprise, but even her tiger eyes quailed beneath the savage glance of her brutal lover. She felt that he was her master! He was not to be led as Marmaduke had been led, because in him there was none of the generous principle, or chivalric sensibility which made Marmaduke, in spite of his impetuosity, pliable and manageable. He had almost as much vehemence, and infinitely more brutality. She saw all this; yet she loved him. Strange paradox of human nature, she loved the

fierce, narrow-minded, ungenerous Maxwell, with a far deeper passion than she had felt for the generous, open-hearted, high-spirited Marmaduke! It may be that she felt more sympathy with a being of a lower order; or it may be that Maxwell alone had conquered her: certain it is, that she felt for him another kind of passion, and was more his slave than he hers. By a not uncommon transposition of places, he, who as an unacknowledged lover had been the most abject slave, became, when acknowledged, the most unflinching tyrant. This is generally the case with brute natures.

It is not to be supposed that she submitted quietly. She was too fond of power to relinquish it without a struggle; but although ridicule was a weapon she wielded with unsparing skill, and a weapon he dreaded more than any other; yet even that was but a small sword which was beaten down by the heavy saber of his fierce sarcasm.

"You do not answer me," he said, irritated at her silence.

"Until you can speak to me as a gentleman," she replied, "I shall remain silent."

"That is an easy way of ending an argument."

"There is an easier."

"Is there indeed?"

"And more efficient—do not force me to it."

"Pray what is it?"

"To leave the room."

She rose and walked to the door, he seized her wrist.

"Let me go, sir; you hurt me. This violence is manly—but it is like you. Let me go. Will you force me to ring the bell and have you ordered out of the house?"

"Ring the bell! you dare not ring it! I defy you. What could you say? What do I do here? Ring it, by all means!"

She was stung by his manner, and looking on him with intense scorn, said—

"I will."

As she moved toward the bell, he drew a pistol from his pocket; she started, terrified at the sight.

"You brave me, do you?" he said, hoarse with passion; "you brave me; well, ring!"

Her hand was on the bell: she hesitated.

"What means that? Do you intend to murder me?"

"I do."

She did not start, she did not scream; a smile of unutterable scorn passed over her face.

"Ring it, I tell you."

"You wish me to order you to be turned out?"

"I wish to end this struggle—and I declare to God that I will end it, either in my favor or with your life. I am reckless; choose you! You think I am a fool; you are mistaken: I am no fool; nor shall you make me one. You say you love me I hope for your sake you speak truly; if you do not, you shall not live to torture me."

"Your hand trembles."

"It is with passion, then. It is because the crisis has arrived. It is because this is the moment that must decide every thing."

Her hand was still upon the bell. Her calmness puzzled and exasperated him, and when she said, with a slight irony in her tone—

"And you really talk of shooting me, to prove your love?"

He leveled the pistol at her, and shouted—

"Ring the bell and try me!"

"I will. But first allow me to observe, that if there is one thing more despicable than the threat you make, it is to commit the exquisitely ridiculous mistake of acting such a part as you now act. Passion might excuse the deed; nothing can efface the childish stupidity of the pretense. Mr. Maxwell, when next you get up a scene like this, at least take care that your pistol is loaded; yours has no cap!"

Having uttered this in the coldest, calmest tone imaginable, she rang the bell.

A cry burst from him as he looked down and saw in truth, that there was no cap on the nipple. He thrust the pistol into his pocket, and threw himself into a chair in wild confusion.

The servant entered.

"Order a cab for Mr. Maxwell," Mrs. Vyner said.

The servant retired, and they were again alone. Not a word passed. Overwhelmed with rage and shame, Maxwell sat brooding on his stormy thoughts. Mrs. Vyner watched him with scorn; he had lost the hold over her which his violence had gained: she now thought that he was not so terrible as Marmaduke had been, and from having feared, she now despised him.

"The cab is at the door," said the servant.

Maxwell did not move. His dark thoughts occupied him. It had been no vulgar threat, for the pistol was really loaded, although the cap had been forgotten; but he understood the contempt with which she must regard him, and he was ruminating projects of vengeance.

She had taken up a book and was affecting to read, as if undisturbed by his presence; he was made aware of it by the rustle of the leaves as she turned them over; and conscious of the disadvantage of his position, he at length arose, and looking at her malignantly, said—

"You fancy me an actor; I am one; my first appearance has been in a farce; laugh, laugh! my next will be in a tragedy!"

And with a low bow he retired.

CHAPTER VIII.

VIOLET WRITES AGAIN.

Les lettres d'amour ne portent l'émotion que dans le cœur qui inspire et qui partage le feu qui les a dictées. Par elles-mêmes elles se ressemblent toutes: mais chaque être épris d'amour trouve dans celle qui lui est addressée une puissance irrésistible, une nouveauté incomparable.

GEORGE SAND.—*Le Comtesse de Rudolstadt.*

YOUR letter, dearest Marmaduke, was a great joy to me, but the joy was dashed with pain as I came to the close, and read there the hope you express of our speedy union. No, that can not be. Oh, do you not feel that it can not be! do you not feel that it does not depend upon my love, but upon the irrevocable past! I thought I had made you understand all my feelings on this unhappy subject, and that I might write to you freely without awakening in either of us a hope which can not be gratified. Your letter has greatly pained me; pained me because you seem to think that, inasmuch as we both love, we must be united—that love will bear down all

obstacles and triumph at last. But no; that can not be. If there were the remotest chance of it, do you think I should not catch at such a hope with all the impatient eagerness of love? Have I nothing to subdue? Have I no temptations to overcome? Think, Marmaduke, my noble Marmaduke, think of what I have suffered and must still suffer when I look upon our fate, and yet can say, am forced to say, we must never meet! I fled from London, fled from you, because I feared the insidious counsels of my heart. My reason tells me that I acted rightly—do you not feel so too?

I had looked forward to this correspondence with such longing! I had pictured all the rapture it would give us both; and see! the first letter from you rips up old wounds, and draws from me bitter, bitter tears.

It must cease, unless you can accept my hard conditions. It must cease, Marmaduke, for I dare not let it continue. I could not trust myself—I should allow myself to be persuaded—your hopes would become my hopes—your prayers would melt my resolution. I know it. I know my own heart; I know its strength and its weakness, and I feel that it would be madness in me to expose myself to the temptation of corresponding with you on *that* subject. You would defeat me at last; and I must not, I *will* not be defeated! Therefore, promise me at once to accept my conditions, promise to love me as one whom an inevitable fate has separated from you and forever. Let us at the outset understand the relation which can alone exist between us. We love, but we must love without hope. Let us accept our fate—a fate which our murmurs or our struggles can not alter, and in this resignation our love will be as a guiding star to light us through life; let our souls blend into one; let our hearts never be separated, and we shall live together in spirit, though distant from each other. This is not the happy lot which might have been ours, but it is the happiest which remains for us. Isolated we shall be; without home, without family; but life will still have one sacred feeling, one immeasurable delight, and above the turmoils and petty cares of the world there will be a heaven for us.

Will you accept my love upon such terms? Will you struggle with yourself as I have struggled, and conquer as I have conquered?

I may seem cold in writing thus! Oh, do not think it; do not think that this conquest has been lightly made! I love you, love you with the passionate excess of a fervid nature: but the stern necessities of our condition imprison me in this reserve. It is because I see no outlet that I am so firm; and it is only since I have clearly seen my lot is inevitable that I have learned to be calm and happy. Write to me without delay, write to tell me that you do not misunderstand me—that you do not think me cold: oh, you can not think *that!* Write to me to tell me that you see, as I see, how our only chance of happiness is in resignation—in love without hope. Write to me to tell me that my love will be as a star to you in your ambitious career, and that when the busy day is done, and night with all its deep repose comes on, your thoughts will then rise from the occupations of the day to that serener sphere where souls commingle. For my love *will* be this to you, dearest; I know it, since I interpret my *own* heart for you.

VIOLET.

CHAPTER IX.

FRANK IN REDUCED CIRCUMSTANCES.

LITTLE Rose Blanche throve apace; but Cecil's painting proceeded slowly, and his mind was still more busy with those imaginary games in which his success was greater and greater every day.

Rose and Julius were in that feverish condition which is common to lovers, whirled amid the bustle of marriage preparations.

Fevers are not usually enviable things; but that is a kind of fever which we all envy. The present how crowded, how occupied, how intense! the future, how radiant, how dream-peopled! The pulse beats, the brain is over-excited, the step is light (and the head also), the face wears an aspect of everlasting beatitude, the hand is generous, the whole man is in a dream.

Some people, indeed, "wondered" at the match; some very ill-favored men couldn't, for the life of them, imagine what she could see in that ugly fellow: while others, less charitable (they were females), would be sorry to hint at any thing illiberal, but they really did think that Rose Vyner, though a lively girl enough, and all that sort of thing, was scarcely the girl to make a good wife. But none of these opinions reached the ears of the parties concerned; and the circle of the Vyners, and the St. Johns was, with few exceptions, sincerely rejoiced at the approaching marriage.

One afternoon while Cecil was laboriously painting, Frank Forrester knocked at his door.

"Not at home, sir," said the girl, resolutely.

"Bah!" said Frank, introducing his person into the passage.

"Indeed he is not, sir; and he's very particularly engaged."

"You see, my lily of Westminster—for you are a lily, damn my whiskers!" said Frank, passing his arm round her waist, and kissing her smutty and reluctant cheek; "you see I understand perfectly well that it is your business to say your master's not at home—

"Yes, sir; he told me so strictly."

"But it is my business not to believe you—so announce me, you peony of Pimlico! announce me.—No; I'll announce myself."

"So saying, Frank marched up stairs, and without ceremony walked into the *atélier*.

Cecil was embarrassed at seeing him.

"What's this? 'cut so old a chum as Frank Forrester! Not at home to Frank! Damn my whiskers! it is enough to make one give the lie to those prime histories of ancient friendship; the Damons and Pythiases didn't say not at home to each other, I presume. What's the start, Cis, my boy? How is it we never see you? How is it I am denied whenever I present my agreeable person at your inhospitable door?"

Cecil briefly explained to him the change

which had taken place in his finances and his habits.

"Quite right, too, Cis. Damn it! there's nothing to be done at *rouge et noir*. I have quite given it up! Unfortunately, not before it cleaned me out. You see," he added, looking down upon his costume, "I am not magnificent—I don't flourish."

To judge by his appearance, indeed, he did not flourish; and Cecil could not help being painfully struck with the contrast between his costume now, and when last he saw him. Rings, chains, studs, shirt pin, and cane were gone. The hat was greasy, and glossy from being carefully brushed after repeated wettings; the cut-away coat was so threadbare, and its collar so greasy, that it seemed as if it had been worn for ten years, and was honrly in danger of falling to pieces. The double-breasted waistcoat, the brilliant shawl-pattern of which was now greatly faded, was buttoned up to the throat. The sky-blue trowsers, worn at the seams, and bagged at the knees, were tightly strapped over a pair of decent boots. Altogether, there was such unmistakable poverty, coupled with such an attempt at style, that his appearance was singularly painful. It was not humble poverty; it was faded splendor. It was the wreck of a man about town.

His face also showed the effects of the change. Poverty had brought with it a forced abstinence from that excitement which hitherto had sustained him; and every one knows the effects which follow any cessation of accustomed stimulus. Frank having been used to live freely, sometimes intemperately, now drank water. Accustomed to the excitement of the gaming-table, he now could rarely indulge in it. Some men, forced to abstain from wine, would have taken to spirits, or even beer; but Frank damned his whiskers, and declared he was a gentleman, and had never learned to "guzzle:" if he could not get wine, and good wine, he would not defile his palate with vulgar drinks.

"What are you doing?" asked Cecil.

"Living the life of a beast, damn my whiskers! dining off a solitary chop, lounging about to be cut by former associates, making vain attempts to induce my friends to go through the matter of form of putting their names to a bill, and moralizing on the fragility of human friendship, and the limits of human credit."

"Well, but have you no means of getting a livelihood?"

"What means? You don't expect me to turn painter, and be moral like yourself, do you?"

"No, indeed; but still, my dear Frank, you must do something."

"Something will turn up, perhaps."

"But if nothing should turn up, what can the end be?"

"Oh! a new broom and a crossing! That's a *dernière ressource*;—not a bad one, either. A man 'sees life' at a crossing; besides, the occupation's healthy—all in the open air. I should make a fortune at it. Damme! a gentleman with a broom—that would produce an effect, I think!"

Cecil shook his head, though he could not refrain from smiling at Frank's coolness.

"You haven't such a thing as a sovereign about you, eh?" said Frank, combing the long, thin hair over the top of his head, so as to hide his daily increasing baldness.

"Yes, Frank, I have, and very much at your service."

"You're a trump!" said Frank, jumping up, and shaking him by the hand. "I have asked that question of eight of my friends within the last two days, and—it was very unfortunate—but at that moment not one of them could lay his hand upon such a thing—damn my whiskers!"

Cecil passed the sovereign to him.

"At any rate, I shall dine to-day," Frank exclaimed.

"Is that any thing new, then?"

"So completely novel, that it has not occurred this whole week. In fact, I haven't what I call *dined* for a month; I have only stifled the baser cravings of hunger, but not satisfied those higher and, perhaps, more imperious cravings of the man who knows how to dine. For, as you know, it is one thing to eat, another thing to eat as an intellectual being should eat. It breaks my heart to pass the club windows, and know how many facilities there are within of dining as a man with an immortal soul should dine—and to reflect how few among the diners know how to accomplish that solemnity."

"Well, but do you mean to say that, in your present state of finances, you intend spending that sovereign on your dinner?"

"That, or the greater part of it," replied Frank, with considerable seriousness. "I have a strong desire to *dine*. I can support hunger; I can live upon a crust (if forced); but, damn my whiskers! from time to time I must satisfy the higher cravings of my nature, and dine."

"Frank, you shall dine to-day, and at my invitation; save that sovereign for next week. I warn you that you will seldom get one from me after this; for I myself am poor. So make the most of it; but to-day we'll dine together."

"We will; the suggestion does credit to your head and heart, Cis."

CHAPTER X.

EFFECTS OF DINING WELL.

After a dinner at the Thatched House, limited in the number of dishes, but selected with the skill of a Frank Forrester, and assisted by a bottle of Barsac, two bottles of Æil-de-perdrix, and a bottle of Romané, the two friends were seated at the table in that state of indolent beatitude which succeeds a scientifically-chosen repast. The pulse is heightened, but digestion is light; the brain is active, yet somewhat dreamy; the will seems lulled, and any thing like an effort seems impossible.

Sipping their Burgundy, Frank and Cecil sat talking over the various experiences of their lives, especially with women—a subject on which men are usually communicative during such hours. Frank was inexhaustible in stories, which made Cecil roll with laughter, or listen with breath-suspended interest. Meanwhile the lights grew dimmer, and their brains grew heavier; the Burgundy was steadily overcoming them. Frank perceiving it, made a move-

ment to go. Cecil tried to persuade him to have another bottle, but he was resolute; and having paid the bill, they departed.

The fresh air somewhat dissipated the effect of the wine, but Cecil was now in a state of craving for a fresh sensation; and when Frank announced his intention of trying his luck with the sovereign he had borrowed, Cecil noisily declared he would go with him.

"Not that I intend to play, though. No, no, I've given that up; that won't do. But come along, Frank; any thing for a lark. Lalla-liety! Lalla-liety!" he shouted, in a feeble falsetto, as if announcing to the universe that *he* was not the boy to go home till morning did appear.

When he entered the gaming-house, Cecil, though perfectly aware of every thing he did and said, was still what is called "far gone;" and the dazzling lights, the well-known cries, the chink of the money, the click of the rake against the coin, the murmur of conversation, all conspired to intoxicate him.

While Frank played, he walked about the room, observing the various countenances of the players. In one corner sat a young man of about three-and-twenty, haggard and pale; he was weeping silently, the tears rolling unheeded down his cheeks, and falling upon the ground, while every now and then a stifled sob seemed to tear his breath. He had lost all.

There was something so painful in this retired sorrow, that Cecil, who was contemplating him with a sort of drunken compassion, went up to him, and said—

"Do not be downcast, sir, fortune may change. Have you lost much?"

"Seventeen pounds," sobbed the young man; "but it was my all—I am ruined! utterly ruined! Fortune can not change for me, for I shall never have another sixpence to tempt her with. O my poor mother! my poor mother!"

A tear stood in Cecil's eye, and he hiccupped. He was debating with himself whether he should give the unhappy youth a chance of recovering his losses. At last, slipping a half sovereign into his hand, he said—

"There—risk that. But if you win back your money, promise me solemnly never to play again. You may not another time find one to give you a chance."

The bloodshot eyes of the youth flashed fire as he saw the piece of gold in his hand. He tried to utter his thanks, but a sort of gurgling murmur was all that escaped. He instantly went to the table and began to play. Cecil, interested in his fate, stood beside him.

He won, and won, and won. In a quarter of an hour, in spite of several losses, he had recovered his seventeen pounds, and five more with them. He repaid Cecil the half sovereign, and, clasping his hand, said fervently—"God bless you! you have saved a fellow-creature!" and ran rather than walked out of the house.

No sooner had he departed than, strange inconsistency! Cecil began to play.

The young man's presence had been a restraint on him, which not even the intoxicating sight of the gold could overcome. He had presented himself as a Mentor to that young man, and could not in his presence descend from the pedestal; accordingly he was irritably anxious for his protégé to win, and to depart. All the time he had been standing at the table, a sort of fever of cupidity possessed him. He staked imaginary sums, and always, or almost always, won. Yes, even with the game played before him, he juggled with himself almost as much as when alone in his *atélier* he played those successful games. Whoever has stood at a table where a game of chance is being played, and has, in imagination only, participated, must remember this:—We choose a side: if it is victorious, we reflect how great would have been our gain; if it is unsuccessful, we say to ourselves, "There would have been a loss;" but we do not, to our minds, realize that loss with any thing like the vividness with which we realize the gain; and, moreover, we constantly shelter ourselves under the idea that "most likely we should not, after all, have chosen that side."

This was the process going on in Cecil's mind as he stood by that table, and saw the game played; and he was impatient for his protégé to begone: so impatient that he cared not whether the youth won or lost; and indeed at one period when the losses were frequent, he was rather disappointed to see a gain follow them, because it deferred the youth's exit. Such is human egotism!

No sooner was he freed from this restraint than, heedless of the whispers of his conscience, he flung down a sovereign, and was soon absorbed in the game.

Frank presently came round to him, having lost back twenty pounds which he had won, and now begged another loan. Cecil took up a dozen sovereigns from the heap before him, and handed them to him with a caution to be careful.

Till deep in the night they played, and Cecil left the house a winner of sixty pounds. Frank had lost the twelve lent him, and was savage against fate. Cecil, half intoxicated as he was, and glorying in his winnings, still felt a pressing sense of remorse, at having been seduced. But he vowed that it should never recur *again;* and told Frank if ever he proposed to go into another gaming-house, from that instant their friendship would be at an end.

"I have been led astray to-night," he said, "but I dare not repeat it. I know what the end must be; and nothing shall make me forget my oath; so remember, Frank, the first word with which you tempt me, is the word that parts us forever!"

"I tempt you, indeed! I didn't propose it to-night, did I? Besides, I have abjured the fickle goddess myself. I touch no more cards. Damn my whiskers!"

Cecil rose the next morning with a fearful consciousness of having broken his oath, and of having again plunged into the mire from which he had been extricated. He was ashamed of his weakness, but tried to convince himself that it was a moment of intoxication, and would not recur.

That night he took Blanche to her father's; the next night he invited Rose to come to them, which invitation, as Julius was included in it, was accepted.

Thus were two days placed as barriers be-

tween him and temptation. He felt the desire so strong within him to return to the gaming table, that he was obliged to place himself in a position which would make that return almost impossible. But the third night, he had no engagement. The passion had grown stronger from the restraint: it subdued him! He struggled with it; he tried to gain courage in reflecting on the miseries which would ensue; but "the still small voice," though heard, was impotent. Passion bullied Reason into silence; unable to answer its arguments it gagged them with a reckless "don't care!"

Struggles were vain: the gamester would fulfill his destiny.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HONEYMOON.

When the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart,
How oft in spirit have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer through the woods!
WORDSWORTH.

Mira queste ruine
E le carte, e le tele, e i marmi, e i templi,
Pensa qual terra premi; e se destarti
Non puo la luce di cotanti esempli,
Che stai? Levati e parti.
LEOPARDI.

JULIUS and Rose were married, and a brighter day never shone upon our island than that which saw these two admirable creatures united.

Vyner's heart was heavy as he gave her away; for although he had the highest opinion of Julius, and thought the match in every way an excellent one, yet Rose was the only child, he had now at home with him; and his affection, rejected by his wife, had turned itself once more toward his children.

They set off for a wedding tour, down the Wye into Wales. Who shall depict their silent, deep, unspeakable happiness, as they felt themselves now forever united? Words have no power of expressing such feelings: there is no standard to which to refer an experience which transcends all former experience. Either the reader has felt this bliss; or he will, some day, feel it. To his own experience I must refer him.

Every thing then has a certain newness; yet every thing comes as such a matter of course! All emotions glide through the soul with such a soft, sure pace, that they excite no surprise even by their novelty. The lovers "feel as if they had been married years;" and yet a curious sense of novelty is always present. They do not feel what they expected to feel; yet are they not surprised. In fact, they are all feeling; all deep, vivid, unspeakable emotion. Hand clasped in hand, lip pressed to lip, eyes fixed on eyes, hours of silent and unbroken bliss pass swiftly on, as if the wide universe were shrunk into one spot, as if a whole eternity were not too great to be filled by that one passion.

Love is the intensest form of life. No wonder, then, that all human beings crave it; no wonder that we all feel a perennial interest in it, and that the look of tenderness we detect in its passage from one loved being to another, stirs strange memories in our hearts, and breaks like a smile over our souls; no wonder that in the cunning pages of the poet, we are fascinated by his pictured reflex of those feelings which belong to our common humanity!

Rose and Julius, so fitly formed to be united, each soul being, in Plato's language, the half of the other—the two souls rushing into a perfect one, and making a harmonious life between them: she so gay, witty, wild, frank, and gentle; he so grave, high-souled, earnest-minded, and so noble; she so beautiful, and he so honest—how could they fail to be happy?

To Tinterne's lovely scenes they at first repaired: a delicious spot, made for honeymoons, did not honeymoons fortunately make every place a paradise. The beauty of the spot was sweetly accordant with their minds; and they were delighted to alternate the admiration of nature with their adoration of each other. The sky seemed more blue, significant, and tender, after witnessing a kiss snatched amidst the tangled overgrowth of shrubs (with most unfeminine indifference, too, be it said, in passing, to the crumpling of bonnets!); and the sunny slopes looked still more verdant, as these lovers chased each other, like happy children, down them.

I am not going to betray any more of the secrets of those Eleusinian mysteries of love; the initiated will understand them; and they alone are fit to hear them.

How Julius and Rose admired Tinterne Abbey! Every body does. Every body remembers Wordsworth's magnificent lines; and it is the glorious privilege of poetry to open our eyes to the divinity of beauty which lies around us, and to confer on nature herself a splendor not her own. But lovers have no need of an hierophant: beauty to them is visible without the poet's aid; for they themselves are poets. And to our lovers the abbey was more exquisite than to any wayfarer's eye, seeking only the picturesque.

"I am often puzzled," said Julius, as they stood within the majestic ruin," to explain how it is that the proportion we so much admire in ancient and in Gothic architecture should be the endless despair of the moderns. With all our perfection of geometry and masonry, we are miserably behind our forefathers in the first principle of art—proportion. We build more comfortable houses; but we can not build a palace, a temple, or a monument. The Comfortable we attain: our efforts after the Beautiful are singularly feeble and abortive. I suppose those writers are correct who place the cause of failure in the absence of that religious idea which animated the ancients. Certainly it seems as if we measured with the rule and compass, rather than with the mind: we aggregate materials, instead of incarnating an idea. We use the symbols of other times, and build churches and cathedrals with the columns and façades from sunny Greece, and the Gothic nave and cross from Germany and France; the flying buttress and the pointed arch side by side the architraves and pediments of Greece!"

"You will call me a little ignoramus," replied Rose; "but I can't help it: I prefer this abbey in its ruins to any perfect work of art. No

doubt, in its original state, it must have been very lovely; but look at it now? With no roof but heaven, no painted windows, but, instead, those charming glimpses of the hills around; and the chinks in the walls—the ruin with its moss and lichens, and the soft shadows thrown on this grassy pavement by the fragments of beauty which are still remaining—is not all this more beautiful than a work of art?"

Julius looked into her eyes, and thought she was right; but what stopped his lips from replying, I leave to the reader's imagination: to my ears it had a very musical sound.

It was in vain they tried to be æsthetical and talk architecture; the time and mood were not made for it; and even the exquisite beauty which surrounded them could only draw from them fragmentary remarks. But if they did not express much, they felt a great deal.

It was not a spot to stand on without having the thoughts constantly withdrawn from the present to the past, of which it was a fragment. The mind would wander. On that very spot where they stood, had many a pious monk bowed himself down in prayer; asking, in the contrition of a weary spirit, for pardon and for courage. The faith which moved him has passed away, effaced beneath the giant march of time; the tesselated pavement no longer echoes the slow and heavy tread of monks, but has been broken and scattered, and has passed away with the faith it served; and, like that faith, exists only in broken fragments, curious among the weeds that have usurped its place. The painted windows

> Richly dight,
> Shedding a dim, religious light—

are no more: yon broken, crumbling shaft, springing up like an aspiring soul to the sky, no longer holds the glass,

> Diamonded with panes of quaint device,
> Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
> As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings.

Looking on these fragments, which speak feelingly of the decay and change of all things, a soft melancholy would invade their minds.

"Every thing then changes, is it so?" asked Rose.

"Every thing," he replied, "but love; and that sustains the world."

Did I not say that lovers were poets! Here is Julius talking a language that would surprise himself, were it not the natural expression of his feelings. And Rose—instead of being witty and sparkling—Rose was throughout their tour so serious and sentimental, that no one would have recognized her; but she was intensely happy in her melancholy, and would not have changed it for all the gayeties in the world.

While I contemplate, not without a touch of envy, this change and its cause, it occurs to me, that as I am, unluckily, in no danger of falling into the error myself I may, to follow my usual bent, moralize for a moment on this all interesting subject of honeymoons.

Rightly is the first month of marriage called a honeymoon: a period of unceasing sweetness, cloying at last upon the palled and exhausted palate, unless it have something higher and better upon which to rest than its mere sweetness. Before the year is out, the "happy pair" have, alas! too often found indifference succeed to this all-exacting, all-impatient passion; a consummation not easily to be avoided, but, perhaps, to be delayed.

Many ingenious writers have tried their hands at a definition of love; may I not venture after them?

Love, in its commonest form, I take to be an *enthusiasm with which the mind intensifies and dignifies its desires.* Unhappily, in most cases, it is only a passing enthusiasm, dying away with the gratification of its desires: and dying, because not founded on lasting qualities; dying, because the sympathies are not involved, because the moral requirements are not responded to with the same facility as the physical. A love, whose root is in passion, and only in passion, can not be supposed to survive the first ardor of that passion. It is only when above and beyond that passion, giving it force, and perpetually renewing it as from a central fire, there exists what I should call a moral passion—an intense moral desire—that the love can be durable. The sensuous desire is violent but limited; the moral desire is infinite; the craving which soul feels for perfect communion with soul, and the infinite variety with which that desire is maintained, give to love its luster and its immortality.

But how are we to distinguish between these two kinds of love? How is a man to know whether he loves in the complete and exalted manner last described, and not in the limited, instinctive, perishable manner? There, I confess, lies the mystery. Time alone can solve it. No man can well discriminate in his own case, and precisely for the reason, that love is an enthusiasm, which not only intensifies, but also *dignifies* his desires, so that, in his eyes, his passion appears exalted, imperishable, unchangeable.

How many an unhappy wretch has awakened from a dream of passion, to find that, after all, it was only his enthusiasm which dignified the object which dignified his passion, and threw around it the luster of immortal youth!

To think of this, to see in your own experience so many examples, is enough to make you register a vow that you will never—no, never again fall in love. The vow may be registered: Love, who "laughs at locksmiths," knows the durability of such barriers as vows; and, looking down with the saucy pity of that imp, Puck, exclaims—

> Lord! what fools these mortals be!

BOOK VIII.

CHAPTER I.

AMIABLE PEOPLE.

It was November. Rose and Julius had returned to London to continue their felicity in a new sphere: they were quite a model couple, and were so happy that several people "of experience" shook their heads skeptically, and exclaimed:—"Ah, well! early times yet, early times!"

What a world of envy in a little phrase!

Meredith Vyner grew morose. His domestic comfort was now utterly destroyed, for his wife was entirely estranged from him; and he was without hope of her ever returning to the former state of hypocritical fondness. Beyond this, Violet would not remain in the house with her step-mother; so that except in his visits to Rose he saw no one that he loved. Blanche was also separated from him: her husband absolutely interdicted all communication between her and her father. This was the result of a violent quarrel on the old subject of his gambling, and of her father's attempt to get her from him.

Cecil's passion for gambling had returned with more than its former force and recklessness. Vyner had discovered it; had suppressed the allowance; lectured Cecil sharply, and endeavored to persuade Blanche to leave him. A complete rupture was the consequence.

The miserable old man saw his daughter's impending ruin, and saw that he was impotent to save her from it. This, added to his domestic sorrows, made him morose. He was a changed being. He became dirtier and dirtier. He never quoted Horace. The dust collected on his manuscripts like the grains of snuff upon his waistcoat, without any effort on his part to shake them off. Life to him was purposeless, joyless.

Mrs. Vyner was as lively and dissipated as ever. No care sat upon her brow; no sorrow darkened her existence. For some weeks after the scene between her and Maxwell, she ceased to see her; a circumstance which made her husband for a moment rejoice; he believed that a rupture having taken place his wife would return to him. The hope was not of long duration. She, at first indifferent, became at last uneasy at Maxwell's absence. She loved him, she was accustomed to his presence, she liked the excitement of his love, with its fierce whims, its brutal expressions, and its passionate, unrestrained vehemence. She *missed* him.

Unable longer to bear his absence, she wrote a long and touching letter, in which real feeling aided her natural adroitness, and gained the victory.

Maxwell was on the point of giving way, when it reached him. Obstinate, violent, and revengeful as he was, he too was so uneasy at being absent from her, that he was glad to have such an excuse for forgiveness. He felt as if he could have stabbed her to the heart; yet he was softened in an instant by her letter.

Peace was made between them. He promised never again to doubt her love; she promised never again to offend him. Things resumed their old course; yes, even to the renewal of his jealousy and his threats; but, on the whole, Mrs. Vyner's brow was smooth!

Not very long after the reconciliation, they were together at a party at Mrs. Langley Turner's. Among the company there happened to be Lord * * * *, notorious in his early days for his successful gallantries and not having yet relinquished the ambition of making conquests. He sat next to Mrs. Vyner who was that evening in high spirits, and looked enchantingly *piquante*. She was a violent radical in her opinions, and a great tuft-hunter; a title was always resplendent in her eyes, no matter what the wearer might be like. It is easily conceivable therefore, how, both as a coquette and a tuft-hunter, she should have been inordinately gratified at the attentions of Lord * * * *. She put forth all her fascinations; and although from time to time she met the dark scowl of Maxwell, who was observing her like a panther watching from his jungle, she only answered his anger with a scornful smile, and continued her attentions to the old nobleman.

As Maxwell saw her rise to depart, he hurried down stairs to the cloak-room, and there awaited her with the intention of expressing his anger, as he handed her into the carriage; but to his rage he saw Lord * * * * accompany her down stairs, gallantly cover her white shoulders with the shawl, and then handing her to the carriage, take leave of her in the most significant manner.

Maxwell with difficulty restrained himself from challenging his rival on the spot.

The next day when he called on Mrs. Vyner, he saw a cab drive from the door: it was Lord * * * * coming from his first visit. Maxwell refused to go in.

Day after day he saw that cab standing there for an hour or two together; he waited in the street the whole time, and in his impatience, the hour seemed quadrupled. It was enough to irritate the least jealous of men; him it drove to phrensy.

Pale with passion, he at last went in, and found the two together. She received him with easy unconcern, as if he were no more than an *habitué*. Lord * * * * looked somewhat "glum" at his presence, and after a few common-places, rose and departed.

"So," said Maxwell to her, when they were alone, "my place is taken, is it?"

"What! jealous again?"

"Not jealous, but convinced."

"Convinced of your own folly?"

"Yes."

"Then, there are hopes of a reformation. George, don't scowl in that way; you are not handsome at any time, and when you scowl, least of all."

"Mary, you must see him no more."

"Him? explain: I hate enigmas."

"Lord * * * *. I insist upon it."

"Now, don't be absurd, pray! Why should I not see a man old enough to be my father?"

"But not too old to be your lover."

"The old story! What a queer creature you are! Why, who ever could suppose there was danger in a man of his age—he hasn't an unbleached hair on his head."

"Perhaps not; but a coronet hides that."

"Ha! ha! ha! Oh, you green-eyed monster! Really, you are capital fun, though you don't mean it."

"Beware, beware!"

"Ah! now you are getting tragic—have you an unloaded pistol about you, by chance?"

A dark smile passed over his face.

"Mary, listen to me: I am very serious. Laugh, if you please, at my jealousy, but at any rate, acknowledge that I have a right to insist on a cessation of his visits."

"I acknowledge nothing of the kind. Why am I to be deprived of seeing whom I please? My husband does not object to my receiving Lord * * * *, why should you?"

"Because you take pleasure in those visits."

"I do."

"They flatter you."

"They do."

"He flatters you."

"He is gallant enough to find my society agreeable—that is more than I can say for yours at this moment."

"You think it a feather in your cap to have a worthless old nobleman dangling after you."

"Perhaps I do; what then?"

"I will not allow it."

"Come, come; this is getting a little too imperious."

"I will not allow it, I say."

"Your permission is not necessary."

"I tell you it *shall not be!*"

"George—I am serious now—as you raise your voice—if you know me, you must know that I may be persuaded to any thing, but I am not to be *driven*. Obstinacy may not be an amiable quality; but it is a quality which belongs to me. Cease that tone of command, therefore; you will get nothing by it."

"I shall *not* cease that tone. I shall adopt any tone I please."

"Do so; then don't wonder if I refuse to listen to you."

"But, by God! you shall listen."

"Try me."

Her eyes dilated as she said this, though her voice was perfectly calm. She was getting almost as angry as he was. The spirit of opposition was abetted by the resolution she had formed not to rebut the attentions of Lord * * * *, and she was now roused for the struggle.

And yet, flattered, as she undoubtedly was, by the admiration of the old roué, she loved Maxwell well enough to have sacrificed that delight, had he taken another course, had he implored instead of threatened; but that was not in his nature, and his brutal imperiousness roused her to rebellion.

He had become livid with passion, and it was only with great effort that he could articulate—

"Don't play with me—you know not the danger—I warn you—I warn you."

"And I laugh at your threats."

"You think I am not serious?"

"I do not care a straw whether you are serious or not."

"You are resolved, then?"

"Quite."

"Oh, beware! beware! do not drive me to the last extremity."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"By God!" he exclaimed, striking a small table with his fist.

"See," she said, "you have broken my china—a real bit of *rococo*; that's what it is to be ungentlemanly and violent."

"Mary—This is—You are rushing to destruction! Look here; I am almost mad—but I know what I say—choose whether you will obey me—if you do not, as I live, I will blow your brains out, and then my own!"

"Mr. Maxwell, if you think I am to be frightened by your ravings, if you think I am to obey your ridiculous caprices, if you think you are to be my *master*, you are egregiously mistaken. Leave the house! leave the house! *I hate you!*"

Her look expressed her hate, as she said this.

He was convulsed; the veins started on his forehead; his chest heaved laboriously, and his eyes were dilated with fury, but he uttered no sound.

"Your love is degradation! Your soul is as ignoble as your manners are brutal! I have put up with this too long. I have been contaminated by your presence, and now, I hate you!"

A sort of gurgle, like the death rattle, sounded in his throat; his face was purple.

"I hate you!" she added. "Is that clear? Do you understand me now!"

With his eyes fixed horribly upon her furious countenance, he put his handkerchief to his mouth; when he removed it, she saw that it was stained with blood.

A sudden sickness overcame her, and she trembled.

He did not speak another word, but staggered, rather than walked, toward the door. Slowly he descended the stairs, and with his handkerchief still at his mouth reached home. The paroxysm of passion had burst a small blood-vessel.

Left to herself, Mrs. Vyner sank on a couch shivering, and her teeth chattering together, from the combined effects of rage, excitement, and fear.

The heavy pall of a terrible doom seemed stretched over her future: dark, mysterious, and awful. She shuddered at the thought of what had passed, and only recovered a slight

degree of calmness as the thought occurred to her, that perhaps that broken blood-vessel might put an end to him!

CHAPTER II.

LOVE NOT KILLED BY UNKINDNESS.

For what will love's exalting not go through,
Till long neglect and utter selfishness
Shames the fond pride it takes in its distress?
LEIGH HUNT.—*Rimini.*

CECIL had removed to miserable lodgings at Hammersmith, consisting of two rooms, and those wretchedly furnished; he had also reduced his expenses by giving up his *atélier*, and was now, without pretense at concealment, a gambler, and nothing else.

Blanche's grief when she first discovered his relapse was not so great as might have been expected, simply because she had to defend him against the bitter accusations of her father, and in the effort to excuse her husband in the eyes of another, she succeeded in greatly excusing him in her own.

There were doubtless many sleepless nights she had to pass, moodily contemplating the probable consequences of their fate; but when Cecil came home her sorrow fled. Either he had won, and then his gayety charmed her, and she allowed herself to be seduced into sharing his sanguine expectations; or else he had lost, and then she had to comfort and console him, and in that effort to assuage his grief, she forgot her own.

There was something indescribably affecting in the tender solicitude and unshaken love of this gentle creature for her wretched husband; she had truly married him for better and for worse, in sickness and in health, in joy and in sorrow, and no adversity could alter the current of that love, which flowed from the everlasting fountain of her heart. He had blighted her youth; he had blighted the existence of their child; but she loved him perhaps still more dearly than on that happy day when the priest had joined them at the altar. He had been weak, contemptible, even infamous; but he had never ceased to be the idol of her heart.

One day she missed her watch; that watch which Cecil had given her, and which had always been at her side. She hunted about the house for it. All day she was in great distress at having lost it, and endeavored in vain to persuade herself that perhaps Cecil had taken it out with him. He returned at two o'clock in the morning. Her first question was,

"Darling, have you my watch?"

"No," said he sulkily.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! it is lost then—I have lost it—some one has stolen it!"

"Pooh! don't make a fuss—it's all right."

"Have you got it?"

'No; but I know where it is."

'Where?"

"In a place where it is quite safe—never fear!"

She understood him. He had pawned it, and the proceeds had gone where every shilling went.

Another day she missed the baby's coral with its golden bells. This time she said nothing; she knew too well what must have become of it, and she burst into tears as she thought of the fearful situation of a father robbing his own child to feed an infatuated passion!

One by one every article upon which money could be raised had disappeared, until he possessed literally nothing more than the clothes he stood up in.

It was in vain she argued with herself that he, as the master, had a right to sell his own property, to sell any thing and every thing he pleased; she could not drive away the idea of there being something sneaking in this furtive disposal of his goods; an open sale might be necessitated, but this silent disappearance by stealth of article after article was horrible. She never knew what was gone until she wanted it; and at last her uneasiness became so great that she trembled to seek the most trifling thing.

Blanche's eyes were not shut to all the weakness of her husband's character, though her affection make her sophisticate with herself to an extraordinary extent. She saw the deplorable effects of his infatuation, and tried her best to wean him from it; but she always trusted that he would see the folly of the pursuit, and that, after a certain amount of experience, he would be cured. Meanwhile, that hope grew fainter as time, instead of lessening seemed to increase his passion.

To Vyner, Julius, Rose, and Violet, it seemed perfectly incomprehensible that Blanche should continue to love such a wretch as Cecil.

"His conduct," Vyner would say, "is enough to have estranged an angel."

Yet the fact is, that his conduct had not in the least degree alienated her affection from him; and the explanation of this fact resides in the moral axiom (the truth of which a large experience of human nature can not fail to illustrate), that affection depends upon *character* not upon *conduct.*

We love those most with whom we sympathize most, not those from whom we have received the greatest benefits. The husband who ill-treats his wife (as people say) is often idolized, while the husband who idolizes his wife is often looked upon as a "good sort of person" at the best. No doubt, the ill-treated wife suffers from, and resents each act of ill-treatment, as the kindly-treated wife is pleased and gratified for each act of kindness; but in the one case, occasional acts can not destroy that sympathy which is the bond of love; nor in the other case, can the occasional kindnesses create it. Again, I say it is character, not conduct, which creates affection.

It was Cecil's character that Blanche sympathized with. His affectionate, caressing manners—his gayety, his cleverness, and as she thought genius, were qualities the charm of which could not be resisted. Then he loved her so truly! not enough, indeed, to forego, for her sake, the excitement of the gaming-table: not enough to prevent his sacrificing her with himself to this infatuation; but that was because he was incapable of *self-control.* And if he was weak, she sympathized with his weakness.

Turn the phrase how we will, it always comes back to these simple, pregnant words: she loved him!

CHAPTER III.

CAPTAIN HEATH RETURNS.

O why, when Love doth wound, doth it not then
Strike deeper down—and kill!

Old Play.

THERE was not a farthing in the house. Cecil was out on the chimerical expedition of borrowing a few pounds from one of his gaming-table acquaintances. Continual assistance had been lent them by Vyner and by Julius; but of course, these sums were dissipated in the usual way; and so recent had been the assistance, that even Cecil had not the face to apply again.

Blanche was weeping over the cradle of her child, whom she had just rocked asleep, when the door opened, and the servant put in her head to say—

"Please, mum, a gentleman."

In another instant, Captain Heath stood before her with outstretched hand, and embarrassed countenance: she grasped his hand in both of hers and pressed it warmly, for she felt that a deliverer was near. Since last they had met, what changes in her life! What had they both not undergone! He was much thinner, and looked older. Sorrow had deeply lined his noble brow, and dimmed his kind blue eye. He had sought in travel to forget the cause of his voluntary exile; and had learned, if not to forget, at least to master his feelings. When men have passed the impressionable and changeable age of youth, love becomes a more serious and enduring passion with them—it becomes consolidated in their manhood. And Captain Heath—too old not to have lost all the volatility of youth, but still too young to have lost its fervor—found that his passion for Blanche was ineffaceable.

Had he then, returned with any hopes? No; his was one of those strong, brave, manly natures which know how to endure any calamity, any condition, so soon as it is recognized as *inevitable*; they endure, without childish repining, what they know must be endured; they brace their minds to the struggle, and they conquer at least that weak and fretful anxiety which attends upon those who can not calmly look fate in the face.

He returned, but it was to watch over his beloved; and on his return, what was his horror to hear of the situation into which her wretched husband had precipitated her!

Blanche was embarrassed, yet delighted. From childhood she had known him, and loved him almost as a father; and to her old affection there was now added, the unconscious flattery of her knowledge of his love for her. No woman is ever insensible to such flattery; the man who loves her, though hopelessly, is always interesting in her eyes. Blanche was eminently a woman.

"How kind of you to come and see us," she said, "and in such a place as this! But then you are one of our true friends, and poverty can not scare you."

"Yes, Blanche I *am* your friend: always remember that, and in any difficulty, be sure not to forget it. But let me see your child: she is asleep?—what a beauty! How you must love it! Dear little thing, how quiet its breathing! may I kiss it? will she wake up?"

"No; kiss her gently: she is so used to it!"

He stooped down, and kissed its warm, soft cheek, and then gazed at it for some minutes in silence. With a mother's pride, Blanche watched him, occasionally looking down upon her darling, with that yearning tenderness, which only mothers know.

A low sigh escaped from him as he turned away from the cradle.

"Have you been long in England?" she asked.

"I came home last week. This is my second visit."

"Your first was to papa, I suppose?"

"Yes. Things are in a sad state there, Blanche. Your father is very much altered. But what could he expect? What could induce him to marry again?"

"Mamma's conduct is shocking!—To think of a wife forgetting herself so!—Did you see her?"

"Yes, and she was as civil to me as ever, talked as hypocritically—and spoke of you in terms that made me excessively angry."

"What did she say?"

"It was not *what* she said, so much as the manner of saying it: the tone of pity, of false pity, affecting to look upon you as if—"

"And what—did she speak of—of Cecil?"

Heath was silent.

"Ah! I know she did; but you must not believe her; indeed, it is not true—indeed, he is not."

"Is it possible?"

"That is—she must have exaggerated. He has been imprudent, unfortunate—but he is the kindest, best of men—they are all against him; they do not understand him; they require a man of genius to be as formal and regular as other men—absurd, is it not? Are not all men of genius—are they not—"

"Unhappily!" replied Heath.

"I know you would not join the cabal against him—you are more liberal! Oh! if you knew his heart, how good it is!—I wish he were here—"

At this moment little Rose Blanche cried, and her mother took her up. The little creature was terrified at first seeing the captain, and clung to her mother for protection; but after a little coaxing she became pacified, and in a few minutes was in his arms and playing with his dark mustache, which greatly interested her.

This interruption saved Heath from an embarrassing situation, and threw the conversation entirely upon the child, of whom the fond mother had innumerable anecdotes to relate, all of which went to the establishment of the fact, that for intelligence and goodness, no such baby was to be met with in the three kingdoms. Heath was too happy to let the conversation continue in that strain, and having spent an agitated yet delicious hour with her, he thought it time to go.

"My dear Blanche," he said at last, "I came here upon a matter of business, which I must not forget in the pleasure of seeing you. My residence in Italy has developed in me a taste for pictures. I am not rich; but I am alone in the world, and can afford to indulge my taste.

Your husband is an artist, and I am come to command a picture from him. I leave the subject, size, and price entirely to him. Let him execute whatever his genius prompts him; and I am quite sure I shall be the gainer by leaving the price to him. Meanwhile, as you are not in flourishing circumstances, here is a check for fifty pounds, on account. When he wants more, he knows where to apply."

He placed a check in her hand as he said this. She understood but too well this delicate mode of assisting them, and a tear rose into her eye as she pressed his hand significantly—she could not speak. He embraced her child repeatedly, and, with a fond, protecting look, bade her good-by.

Left alone, she burst into tears; they were tears of gratitude and tears of shame—gratitude for the beautiful and delicate friendship of the act and its manner—shame at finding herself reduced to such a state that she was forced to accept alms from her former lover.

As she grew calmer, the thought rose within her, that perhaps this might be the saving of Cecil—that he, finding employment, might resolutely set to work, and, no longer forced to seek a subsistence by gaming, resume his honorable career.

Building cloud-castles on the landscape of the future, she was light and joyous when Cecil returned, and flung herself upon his neck with almost frantic delight.

CHAPTER IV.

HUMBLED PRIDE.

Cecil received those demonstrations of joy with moody sullenness. He had returned exasperated by failure, gloomy with the dark thoughts which lowered upon him, like heavy clouds collected over the sunny fields, boding a coming storm.

"Blanche," he said, "we are beggars."

The smile was still upon her face; she pushed the hair gently from off his forehead.

"There is no hope left. I have tried every body."

"I have had a visitor, darling, since you went out. Guess who it was."

"Julius?"

"No."

"Your father?"

"No."

"A dun?"

"Captain Heath."

"The devil, it was!"

"Yes; I thought it would surprise you. Oh! I was *so* happy to see him!"

"Heath—here!" exclaimed Cecil, his cheek burning as he spoke. "And you saw him—received him here—and in my absence!—you did?"

"Was I wrong?" she, trembling, asked.

"Wrong? Oh, no; it was not wrong to receive your lover. You needn't start—he is your lover, and you know it! You know, moreover, that I hate him. The scoundrel! And he saw you here—here, in this beggarly place—in this hole of poverty! And he triumphed over me—triumphed because his prophecy was fulfilled! Didn't he, too, urge you to leave me? Didn't he, too, tell you I was a villain, dragging you to ruin? Didn't he offer to take you home? Speak! don't stare at me in that way! Tell me all the scoundrel said—quick!"

"Cecil, Cecil, down on your knees, and beg his pardon for having so slandered him! You are not in your senses to speak so—and of him, of him!"

"Slandered him, have I? What! the sneaking wretch who takes advantage of my present situation—"

"To assist *you*!" indignantly exclaimed Blanche.

"Assist *me!* and for what *purpose?* For whose sake—for mine? No—for yours! Oh! I see all his plans—I see them all!"

Cecil, mad with jealousy and rage, dashed his hand upon the table, and swore a fearful oath. It was not that he for a moment suspected his wife; but he had never been able to overcome his jealousy of Heath; and what added tenfold torture to that venomous feeling now, was the thought that Heath had come back to find Blanche reduced to want—to find her in this miserable lodging, deprived of all the comforts and necessaries of life. He felt himself horribly humiliated in the eyes of his hated rival; he felt that his rival triumphed over his degradation; and he dreaded lest Blanche should have made an involuntary comparison between her present condition, and what it would have been had she married Heath. All this rapidly crossed his mind, and drove him to fury.

"Cecil," she said, struggling with her tears, "you are unhappy, and that makes you unjust. If you but knew the noble nature of him—"

"Hold your tongue! Am I to sit here and listen to *his* praises? Noble nature, indeed! Yes, yes, I know it—I know it."

"Then you know—"

"Silence, I say! Are you going to draw a comparison between us? Are you going to contrast his virtues with my vices? A good subject, but a bold one for a wife to touch upon!"

"Cecil, you break my heart. Will you hear me?"

"No!"

"What have I said or done—"

"You have received, during my absence, a man I hate—a man who, if he again crosses my threshold, I will throw out of the window."

"Look at this!" she said, presenting the check to him.

"What is that?"

"If you will not listen to me, trust your own eyes."

"A check for fifty pounds—and from *him?*"

"He came here to command a picture; you are to name your own price; that is on account."

Cecil took the check, looked at it, and then at her.

"And do you believe this?" he said, with intense calmness. "Do you really believe that he wants a picture?"

"No; I believe that to be an excuse—"

"An excuse! By God! she knows it!"

"It is a delicate way of assisting us. That

is the conduct of the man whom you have outraged by your suspicions."

Cecil was stupefied. Her perception of the subterfuge quite staggered him.

"So, so—he thinks to *buy* you, does he?" he at last said, choking with rage.

She colored deeply with shame, and exclaimed—

"Oh, Cecil! Cecil!"

"Well, then, to buy *me!* He thinks I am to be *patronized*—to be his workman—to receive his orders—to receive his money! Blanche, this check is either an outrage to you, or an insult to me. Don't speak!—Not another word."

He rose, and put on his hat.

"Good God! Cecil, what are you about to do?"

"To find out this liberal patron."

"Cecil, Cecil! do be calm!"

"I am. I will fling this check in his odious face, and tell him what I think."

She threw herself upon him.

"Cecil! my own darling! listen to your Blanche. For God's sake, be calm! Think of me; think of your child! A duel! oh, Cecil! could you leave your child fatherless, Cecil?"

He flung her from him, and rushed out of the house: she reeled and fell. The child began to scream; the old lady living in the parlors hurried up-stairs, and found Blanche lifeless on the floor.

Like a madman, Cecil bounded along the streets, goaded by one of those irresistible outbreaks of passion which sometimes mastered him. On reaching the house where Heath formerly lived, and hearing that he no longer lived there, he remembered Heath having just returned from abroad, and that his residence could only be known at his bankers. Thither he went: on his way he passed through Jermyn-street. It was in that street was kept the gaming-house where he had spent so many of his days and nights.

A new direction was given to his thoughts; insensibly they left the subject of Captain Heath to merge into that of play. Still he walked on, but less swiftly. The idea of the splendid martingale he had recently discovered, which this fifty pounds would enable him to play, would not leave him.

He walked more and more slowly. Fifty pounds—it might make his fortune.

After all, Heath might possibly have desired a picture. The fool, as if he knew any thing about pictures—he, the heavy guardsman, purchase pictures!

Yet, if he was rich, that was one way of spending his money. There was nothing but what was perfectly legitimate in an artist receiving a commission—all artists receive them.

And with this fifty pounds a fortune was within his grasp.

He no longer walked, he crawled.

This money was certainly his, if he chose to take it; why should he refuse? To be sure, the money of that scoundrel! All an excuse, too; Blanche knew it was an excuse.

He quickened his pace again. He was at the banking-house: he pushed the door, and entered.

"I can return him the money to-morrow. I will say Blanche changed it. Out of my winnings I can repay it."

He handed the check to the cashier.

"How will you take it, sir?" demanded the cashier.

"Gold," was the brief answer.

His eyes sparkled as the fifty sovereigns were shoveled across the counter; and he left the bank with lights dancing before him.

CHAPTER V.

"BLACK WINS."

The fascination of the gaming-table was too much for him; all his sense of dignity vanished before it; even his very jealous rage seemed thus powerless against it. Humiliated as he felt at the idea of accepting charity from his rival, he could not reject it when it came to feed his passion for play. Although he had not a farthing in the house, although utter destitution threatened him, he would not, to save himself from it, have accepted Heath's assistance; but he could accept it when it enabled him to play.

To one of his old haunts he went. The first man he saw there was the large-whiskered, jovial, and eccentric gentleman whom he had noticed on the second evening of his entering a house of play: he had since lost sight of him. The little man stroked his bushy whiskers fondly over his face, and offering Cecil a pinch of snuff, expressed his pleasure at meeting him again.

"Come to try the goddess, sir?" he inquired. "Fickle goddess! now smiling, now frowning—quite a *woman!* I am no great hand *myself;* but, as far as a few crowns go, I find it a *pleasant game*—decidedly pleasant. Would you like to *regulate* yourself by my *card?*—duly *pricked*, you see. There have been three runs upon the black; once it turned up eleven times. Shall we take a glass of *wine* together? Yes—waiter! some *wine.*"

"No wine for me, thank you; I never touch it before dinner.—Have you seen Mr. Forrester here to-day?"

"The gentleman with the large mustaches? —Yes; he has been playing, and *won;* but he went away about a quarter of an hour *ago.*"

Cecil took his seat at the table. Gambling by day has, somehow, a more hideous aspect than by night: I suppose because it looks so little like an amusement, and so much like a mere affair of cupidity. But Cecil had grown used to this, as to other loathsome aspects of his vice, and sat down to the table with as much *sang froid* as if he were about to transact the most ordinary piece of business.

He had not been playing long, winning and losing in pretty equal succession, when Frank came back.

"What, again!" said Cecil. "I thought you had gone for the day: I heard you had departed with your winnings."

"The fact is, that I found my winnings rapidly decreasing, so I thought a little interval might very properly elapse; after which fortune again might be on my side. Besides, old boy, you must know that I haven't dined for eight

days; and when I say dined, I don't mean dining in the true sense, but in the common, vulgar, *pauper* sense of the word. I have made no meal which could *represent* a dinner. For eight days I haven't touched meat, damn my whiskers! So, being as ravenous as a hyena, I determined that to-day, at least, I *would* dine."

"And have you?"

"Have I, Cis? Why, it's not yet five; do you imagine that under *any* circumstances, I could lower myself so far as to dine at the shopkeeper's hour? No, damn it! one may be hard up, but one does not forget one is a gentleman!"

"Have you ordered your dinner, then?"

"More than ordered it—*paid* for it. I went to the butcher's, and bought two pounds of magnificent steak; this I carried to a small Public, hard by, with the strictest injunctions as to the dressing of it—saw the cook myself, and am satisfied she knows what's what. It is to be ready at half-past six precisely, with no end of fried potatoes, and a bottle of their old crusted, which I know from experience is a wine that a gentleman can drink. The dinner you will say is not epicurean, but at any rate it is *certain*, because I have paid for it all. Now, I don't mind risking the rest of my winnings. My mind is at rest; the baser appetites are provided for."

He began to play also; and he won.

"I told you luck would change," he said.

But he soon lost again, and lost repeatedly.

"Never mind, I have secured a dinner for to-day, which will last a week."

Cecil was equally unfortunate; the run seemed to be decidedly against him.

At last Frank threw down his final half-crown. It went like the others. He started up, and hurried away, without saying good-by; indeed, giving no other expression of his feelings than was conveyed in an energetic denunciation of his whiskers.

Cecil played on; and as he saw the sovereigns disappear in spite of his famous martingale, his heart sank within him, and the gloom of despair seemed to paralyze his mind. Suffering horrible agony from the intense excitement of each *coup*, he yet played mechanically, almost listlessly. He lost and won, and lost again, with fearful alternation of sick despair and dull joy. It was as if he were staking his heart's blood on each turn.

Frank returned, not without a certain hilarity in his manner.

"Where have you been?" Cecil faintly inquired.

"To my worthy host of the Coach and Horses, at whose house my dinner is commanded. It struck me that I could very well dispense with wine to-day—the more so as it costs six shillings a bottle, and here one gets it for nothing—so I negotiated with the worthy publican, and sold him the wine back again for two half-crowns. Here they are. What d'ye think of that? Is that management of financial difficulties, eh?"

A sickly smile was the only answer Cecil gave, for at that moment he had just lost his fourth *coup* running. The two half-crowns seemed to bring back Frank's luck, for he won rapidly; Cecil, who played the same colors, also won. Winning and losing, and losing and winning, so the game went on, with alternate rising and falling of hopes; and in the rapidity with which small gains mounted up to large sums, and those sums dwindled down again, crowding as much excitement as would have filled a month of ordinary life.

"Done! cleaned out!" exclaimed Frank, as he saw himself once more penniless.

A sharp pang shot across Cecil's face, as he threw down his last sovereign on the red.

"*Après*," said the dealer.

Cecil had now only ten shillings remaining of the fifty pounds. In breath-suspended agony he watched the cards.

"Red wins?" said the dealer.

He breathed again, and looked round to smile at Frank; but that worthy had again departed to negotiate the sale of his dinner.

Yes; this dinner, so cherished, so anticipated, paid for in advance, on which the imagination had luxuriated as on a kingly banquet; this dinner was sold for a miserable trifle, that he might risk one more *coup* at that table where so many men had ruined themselves before!

Cecil continued in luck until Frank returned; this time with no hilarity on his face, but a quiet gravity, which seemed prepared for the worst; and when he lost the last shilling he broke out into a short, sharp, hysterical laugh, and turning to Cecil, said with forced calmness—

"I shall not dine to-day."

"Pleasant *game* this, sir," said the bushy-whiskered gentleman, coming up to where Frank sat, "take a pinch of *snuff*, sir?" Frank accepted with grace, and began chatting with the smiling gentleman, who was very communicative, and informed Frank that he had that afternoon won no less than ten half-crowns by backing the red.

"Quite right, sir," said Frank, "red *is* the color."

"No doubt about it."

"Yes, yes. By the way, you haven't a half-crown about you at this minute, have you? I am cleared out for the day."

"Why, I certainly *have* such a thing, but—"

"Say no more, my dear fellow," said Frank, shaking him warmly by the hand, "half a crown will be abundance, I only want to try the red once. I'm really obliged to you for the offer of the loan, and shall accept it with pleasure. Nowadays one does not often meet with such a trump! If ever you should run low, you know, in me you will always find one ready to reciprocate a civility."

The smiling gentleman rubbed his whiskers and filled his nose with snuff; but he concluded by slipping the half-crown into Frank's hand, who instantly threw it on the red.

Cecil had thrown his last five pounds upon the red, and with straining eyeballs watched the falling cards.

"Black wins," said the dealer.

Frank saw the croupier rake away his half-crown, and with it Cecil's five pounds.

A low cry burst from Cecil, as he learned his fate; and, leaning his elbows on the table, he let his head fall into his hands, and sobbed aloud.

The dealers and croupiers, accustomed to every expression of grief, sat with immovable, expressionless faces, pursuing their routine with an indifference which was quite ghastly. The players looked upon him with different feelings: some with compassion, some with contempt, some with sympathetic fear. But above his wretched sobs were heard the unvarying tones of "Gentlemen, make your game; the game is made."

Frank touched Cecil on the shoulder, and beckoned him to come away. Mechanically Cecil did so, and they stepped together out into the dull, dismal, November evening, and walked through the mist and lightly falling snow, without uttering a word.

At Park Lane they parted; a pressure of the hand was the only expression of their feelings which passed between them. Sick at heart, they both felt that nothing could be said to comfort them.

The lights glimmered dimly through the dirty air of that November evening, and the snow fell, and the rain, and the whole scene was drear and desolate, as Cecil wandered on, crushed in spirit, savage from remorse, exasperated by his impotent efforts to shake off the galling remembrance that he was now Heath's debtor—that he had taken his money, and could not throw it back at him.

Wild thoughts of suicide chased across his soul, like dancing lights over a bleak moor at night; but they did not long abide with him.

CHAPTER VI.

CECIL'S WEAKNESS.

O God! O God! that it were possible
To undo things done,—to call back yesterday!
That Time could turn his swift and sandy glass
To untell days, or to redeem these hours!
HEYWOOD.—*A Woman Killed with Kindness.*

WHEN Blanche returned to her senses, she found herself in the arms of her landlady, who was bathing her forehead with vinegar and water.

"My husband!" she murmured; "where is my husband?"

"Oh, he's not come back yet. There, you are better now, aren't you!"

"Thank you; yes, I can walk now."

"Don't attempt it just yet."

"I must. I must go out."

"Go out such a day as this! Why, see how it snows."

"I must. You see I can stand. Oh, pray God, I may not be too late."

"But where do you wish to go, my dear? Can't I send my girl for you?"

"Where? Where? Ay, indeed. He did not tell me where. But then Cecil will not know where to find—Thank God! Thank God!"

She sank down again upon the chair, relieved of her terrible anxiety; for she doubted not that if Cecil were unable to meet with Captain Heath, he would soon grow calmer, and look at things more rationally.

She waited for his return, however, with extreme uneasiness, fearful lest he should not have missed the captain; and dreading lest he should still continue his jealous suspicions. Free from all sentiment of jealousy herself, she could not understand Cecil's excessive susceptibility; and knowing Captain Heath so well as she did, she was perfectly convinced that her husband's jealousy was quite motiveless. This made her feel secure on this subject. Her deep sense of her own innocence, and of Heath's high-mindedness, made her convinced that Cecil must see the matter in its true light, so soon as he should calmly consider it.

It was nearly seven o'clock before her anxiety was relieved by hearing his knock at the door; but she screamed with terror as he entered the room. Although his coat and hat were covered with snow, he had left his chest exposed to the cold, and his shirt-collar and front were dripping with wet. He had evidently been altogether heedless of his person, and had given no thought of protecting it from the weather.

His face was pale and haggard, his eyes dull and blood-shot, his lips compressed—his whole aspect that of one who has just committed some fearful crime. She interrogated his face with watchful terror. He avoided her eye.

He seated himself in silence, and began brushing the snow off his hat. That completed, he placed his wet feet on the fender, and looked steadfastly at the fire.

Unable to bear this suspense, she went up to him, and laying her hand upon his shoulder, said timidly—

"Have you seen him?"

"No."

She felt greatly relieved. He continued to look at the fire, but gave no signs of wishing to prolong the conversation. She drew a stool by his side, and sat down upon it; and in silence they both contemplated the evanescent shapes in the burning coals.

Having sat thus for some time, Blanche rose and went into the next room, and presently returned with her baby in her arms, asleep, which she gently laid upon Cecil's lap.

He turned a dull, sad eye upon her, inquiringly, and then looked down upon the sleeping infant on his knee.

"Unhappy child!" he said, and the tears rolled down his cheeks, as he gazed upon the sleeping babe, unconscious of the sorrow it awakened in its father's heart, and the remorse for infatuated villainy, the consequences of which must eventually fall upon its head.

"Take her away," he said, "take her away. Why do you bring her to me?"

"To make you happy."

"To make me more miserable than I was before—to reproach me—me, her father, that she has not a better home, warmer clothing? Take her away."

Blanche, sobbing, took the child and laid it again in its cradle.

"Blanche you must write a note for me," he said after a pause.

"To whom, dearest?"

No reply.

"To whom am I to write?"

"To—Captain Heath!" he said, with an effort.

She started at the name, alarmed and wondering.

"What am I to say?"

"Whatever you please—you are sure to succeed."

"But tell me what the object is?"

"Money."

"Money!"

"For my picture—I am to paint him one, am I not? he has ordered it. Well! I want money in advance."

Blanche would have been highly delighted at such a speech, had it been uttered in a different tone, and had not Captain Heath, already that very day, given a check in advance.

She made no reply.

"Well!" he said, "are you ready? Write it at once."

"But the fifty pounds—"

"Gone! I met a man to whom I owed it—he demanded payment—I was forced to let him have the check. You can explain it all to Heath and tell him I must have ten pounds more to buy materials with. Tell him what you please, but get the money."

He resumed his contemplation of the fire after this speech, and scarcely opened his lips again for the evening. Blanche wrote the letter, but it was with loathing, and she hated herself while she was doing it, and was sure Captain Heath would also hate her.

Glad as she would have been to see her husband relinquish his absurd jealousy of the captain, it came with quite a different aspect when that relinquishment was not a matter of conviction, but of degraded calculation. She guessed at once the truth of the whole history; she saw that Cecil had gambled away the fifty pounds, and that he had not only reconciled himself to it, but had made up his mind to extort from the generosity of the captain certain sums which would enable him to indulge his unhappy passion.

What a situation for a loving wife! Never before, not even in his worst exhibitions of selfishness and weakness, had Blanche despised her husband; but she could not master the feeling now; a lurking sense of contempt would intrude itself upon her thoughts.

The letter was sent under cover to her father.

All the next day Cecil sat over the fire, sometimes whistling, but mostly quite silent. He was playing over again the games which he had lost on the previous day: and now, as he played them, he calculated rightly, and always won.

Blanche observed, that he exhibited singular impatience for the arrival of the postman; and when the day entirely passed over without bringing a letter, he constantly muttered to himself, "Very extraordinary!"

The next morning his impatience was greater, and when the two o'clock postman brought a letter for her from Rose, and nothing from Captain Heath, he began to swear and mutter to himself, till she was quite terrified.

He took up his hat and lounged out, without saying a word as to where he was going.

About three, Captain Heath called. Blanche was frightened lest Cecil should return and find him there; and was also alarmed at the probable storm which would burst upon her in consequence of this visit

Heath saw her embarrassment, and attributed it to a sense of shame at her husband's conduct; for the note was so incoherently written that he divined pretty nearly the whole truth of the matter.

"I have brought a check for your husband," he said, "because I did not wish to trust it to the post—also, because I wished to say a word to you. Blanche, I take the privilege of an old friend, to speak frankly to you; therefore, you must not be offended with me when I ask you to receive another ten pounds, in advance for the picture, besides the check which your husband has requested. I mean the second sum to be received by you, for household expenses—to be kept a secret by you—you can keep a secret from your husband, can you not?"

"Why do you wish it?"

"Because, Blanche, affairs are not in a flourishing condition with you at present; and as your husband owes a good deal of money, perhaps, if he knew you had this sum, instead of allowing it to be devoted to your immediate necessities, he might also pay that away."

She blushed deeply, as she perceived that he had guessed the truth.

"I wish, therefore, that you would give him this check from me, which he has asked, but that you would say nothing, if you can help it, about the other sum. I am asking, perhaps, that which I ought not to ask. I am overstepping, perhaps the bounds of friendship, and interfering in domestic concerns where I have no sort of right to interfere. But it is my friendship which dictates the wish, and which must be my excuse. I do not bind you to any condition; I do not even wish you to keep the matter a secret, if it is at all repugnant to your feelings; but I would strenuously advise you to do so. Act just as you think fitting and proper; do not imagine that I wish in any way to dictate to you but as a brother might counsel you, I would venture to suggest, that on many accounts it would be well if you did not speak of this."

"Kindest, best of men!" she exclaimed, pressing his hand. She could say no more.

He quietly laid the check upon the mantlepiece, and slipped ten sovereigns into the pocket of her apron. He then, to change the subject, asked after Rose Blanche, who was brought to him immediately.

Blanche, after a long struggle with herself, at last said—

"Captain Heath, you know me well enough to believe that I am neither insensible to your friendship, nor ungrateful for it—do you not?"

"Assuredly, dear Blanche."

"And if I were to say any thing to you that might look ungrateful, you would not believe that it sprang from ingratitude? you would at once see that I was forced by circumstances, not by my own will?"

He shook slightly, as he answered—

"I could not doubt you."

"You do not believe me to be capricious?"

"I do not."

"And if I were to beg you—to—if I were to say—do not come here any more—?"

Her voice faltered, and died away in a whisper. He started as the words fell on his ear, and turned first red, then pale again.

There was a moment of embarrassed silence.

"Oh! do not believe," she passionately ex-

claimed, "that it comes from me; do not fancy that I should ever— But I can not do what my heart dictates: I owe obedience to another."

He saw at once what was in her mind; he saw that Cecil's absurd jealousy was at the bottom of her agitation; and in a low but firm tone, he said—

"Blanche, do not continue. I understand you. I never was a favorite of his, and he naturally enough does not desire my acquaintance; in which case, of course, I must relinquish the pleasure of seeing you. Do not sob, Blanche—you can not help this. Such cases are frequent. I shall not regard you less—shall not be less your friend, because I am not permitted to see you. Perhaps, if he knew me better, he might think otherwise of me; but sympathy is not to be commanded, and too many people dislike me, for me to be either surprised or hurt at his opinion. Besides, I have already interfered too much between you. He thinks my conduct unwarrantable—perhaps it was—and he dislikes me. There, you see, I look at the matter in its true light. I do not blame you—I do not blame him. A husband is not forced to accept the friends of his wife."

At this moment Cecil returned.

Heath colored as he saw him enter the room; Blanche turned aside her head to conceal her tears, but not before Cecil's glance had detected them; a fierce pain shot across Cecil's heart, as if a burning iron had entered it, but with a hypocritical smile he extended his hand to the captain, and expressed himself delighted to see him.

The situation was excessively uncomfortable for all three. The captain could not depart, it would have looked so pointed, yet to remain was torture. Blanche was terrified, and silent. Cecil, who in an instant saw that Heath's presence betokened a fresh assistance from him, stifled the horrible jealousy which his presence awakened, and resolved not to lose the benefit. He began a common-place conversation, and soon led it to the subject of the commissioned picture, for which he declared he had been inspired with a magnificent idea.

Heath's replies were brief and cold; but Cecil was not to be daunted. So completely had his vice corrupted him, that he had lost all sense of dignity, and only looked upon the captain as a victim from whom to draw sums of money. That Heath loved his wife he knew; and doubted not but that from such an affection he should draw golden results. That Blanche did not return the captain's love he was firmly convinced—and yet that conviction could not allay his jealousy. Awful moral perplexity and corruption! Despicable weakness and meanness! Here was a man base enough to barter his honor, yet not strong enough to resist the petty irritation of the pettiest jealousy!

As the captain took his leave, Cecil said:—

"We are generally at home—if you should be in this neighborhood, pray don't forget to give us a look in. It is but a miserable place to come to—but old friends, you know."

Blanche's eye met the captain's, and most significantly expressed—"Don't accept the invitation."

Heath merely bowed his acceptance, and departed, marveling much whether it was corruption or irony which dictated Cecil's speech.

Cecil made no observation to Blanche respecting the captain's presence; but took up the check with delight, and forthwith proceeded to get it cashed, and to carry the money to Leicester-square, whence after spending the afternoon and night at play, with various alternations of fortune, he came away a winner of thirteen pounds.

He was in excellent spirits on his return home. Blanche said nothing respecting the ten sovereigns in her possession.

CHAPTER VII.

ALL HOPE DESTROYED.

I am so well acquainted with despair,
I know not how to hope; I believe all.
DECKAR.

Oh! press me, baby, with thy hand,
It loosens something at my chest;
About that tight and deadly band
I feel thy little fingers prest.
WORDSWORTH.

ALTHOUGH the life of a gamester is full of emotion, full of successes and reverses, the incidents are all so very similar that I need not enter into more details. Suffice it, that Cecil made such frequent applications to Captain Heath, that a point-blank refusal came at last; much to Blanche's satisfaction, for she deeply felt the humiliation of seeing him plundered in that shameless way to feed the gaming-table. She knew that it was for her sake Heath gave the money; and she knew that it only added fresh fuel to her husband's unhappy passion.

The last few weeks had completely banished from her heart all hope of an amendment. Not only had Cecil shamelessly applied to Heath for money in advance on a picture which he had made no attempt even to commence; but he had, by one act, opened her eyes to the extent of his reckless infatuation.

It was about a fortnight after Captain Heath's visit, when, as Cecil sat in his usual attitude, over the fire, indolently smoking a cigar, Blanche said to him—

"When are you going to paint that picture, dearest, which you have engaged for?"

"In good time."

"But why not do it at once?"

"He did not stipulate that it was to be done at once, did he?"

"No; but there can be no reason why you should not do it. You have nothing else in hand. Besides, when that is finished you can paint another; and you know how badly we want money."

"Badly enough, God knows!"

"I do not like to accept the advances he makes us, when I see you not working at the picture."

"Bah!"

"You must do it sooner or later; why not now? Come, Cecil, make an effort—begin it."

"Begin, when I haven't even money to buy the necessary materials. Write to him and tell him I have a splendid subject, but that really—"

"That is unnecessary. I have money—I will go and get you all you want."

"You, Blanche! And where did you get money from?"

"Never mind," she replied, playfully. "Perhaps it was a little fairy. Enough that I have some."

"Oh, I'm not curious; so that you have got money, that is all I care about. How much?"

"There, again! Not curious! Why, you are as curious as a woman. Don't inquire."

"Very well. Get me the things, that's all."

She went into the next room, and he heard her unlock a drawer. He continued calmly smoking; she put on her bonnet and tripped down stairs.

No sooner did he hear the street-door shut than he rose and walked into her bed-room to search for the money. He saw a drawer with a key in it, but on opening it he found nothing there. He next unlocked all the other drawers, but without result.

There was nothing now in the room likely to conceal any money, and he began to think that perhaps she had only a few shillings, which she had carried away with her. Almost mechanically he opened the small drawer of her wash-hand stand, and there he saw six sovereigns glittering in the farther corner. His face lighted up with a strange expression as they met his eye, and rapidly clutching them, and turning over the drawer to see if it concealed any more, he took his hat, and was out of the house in an instant.

When Blanche returned and found him gone, her heart misgave her; with trembling limbs she staggered into the bed-room, opened the drawer, and saw her fears confirmed. It is impossible to render the despair which seized her at this discovery. That little incident was more frightful to her—was more damning evidence of the unconquerable nature of his vice—than any she had yet known; and, helpless, hopeless, she sank upon the bed—not to weep, but to brood upon the awful prospect of her life.

It was not grief which laid her prostrate—it was a stupor—a dull, heavy agony, like a shroud, closing her from life, from hope, from happiness. Before, her heart had been wrung; she had been humiliated, she had been tortured; but in the bitterest moments, she had never been utterly prostrate—never absolutely without gleam of hope. Now, her husband stood before her as irreclaimable—marching with frightful rapidity to his doom, and dragging with him a wife and child.

That child's cries on awaking partly aroused her. She felt the necessity for an effort; she felt that another demanded she should not give way to the stupor which oppressed her. She put the child to her breast; but, alas! the shock she had received had dried up its life-giving fountains, and the disappointed infant sucked in vain. Tears gushed from her, as she became aware of this new misfortune—tears, scalding yet refreshing tears, which melted down her stubborn grief into something more like human woe; and, relieved by them, she rose to make some food for the hungry babe, whose impatient cries recalled her to a sense of duties, which allowed not the passive indulgence of sorrow. Cecil, meanwhile, had lost the little treasure he had obtained possession of in so despicable a manner; and having lost it, remained sauntering about the streets, without courage to return home to face his wife. Exhausted at last by fatigue, he came back.

Not a word passed between them. He got into bed, feeling humbled and exasperated, yet not having courage even to put a bullying face on the matter. She was brushing her hair, and he heard the sighs which she struggled to suppress, but he feigned sleep, and *would not* hear them.

She crept into bed, anxious not to awake him; and through the long night he heard her weeping, so that it almost broke his heart; yet he feigned sleep, and dared not speak!

From that time there was always a sort of barrier between them. A wall had grown up between their loves, formed out of shame, remorse, pity, and hopelessness. They never alluded to the incident which caused it; but they both felt that it was constantly present in each other's minds.

Their existence was wretched indeed. Vyner and Julius took care that Blanche should want for no necessaries—food, clothing, little articles of necessity, were all regularly sent in by them, and the rent was paid by Vyner himself. But no more money could Cecil extort from them on any pretext. They knew well enough, that to give him money was only to give him opportunities of playing, and so they limited their charity to seeing that Blanche and her child were not in absolute want.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FORGERY.

One day as Cecil was sauntering down Piccadilly, he was astonished to see Frank Forrester, in a superb cab, with tiger behind, drive up to Burlington Arcade, and there, arrayed in dashing style, step out as if the lord and master of three thousand a year, at least.

The contrast between his appearance at that moment, and the last time Cecil had seen him, when, in the final stage of seediness, he had gambled away even his dinner, so amazed Cecil, that he rubbed his eyes as one awaking from a dream.

"Ah! Cis, my boy, how are you?" said Frank, grasping him by the hand. "Why, you're quite a stranger.—I am so glad to see you. Flourishing now, damn my whiskers! flourishing, Cis, as you perceive. Nobby style, eh? Correct thing that, I hope?"

"Quite.—But whence this change?"

"Oh! tell you that presently. Just step up the arcade with me—I'm only going to look in upon Jeffs, to see if Paul de Kock's last novel has arrived, and then command me."

He put his arm within Cecil's and marched up the arcade, playing with an elegant watch-chain which drooped from his waistcoat button, and winking at every woman they passed.

When they turned into Jeffs' shop, that worthy bibliopole, albeit accustomed daily to a strange variety of customers, from noblemen and their flunkies to dingy, sallow foreigners, redolent of garlic, and bearded like pards, opened his eyes at such a strange apparition as

the resplendent, insolent Frank, arm in arm with the care-worn, battered, shabby Cecil.

"Paul de Kock arrived yet?" said Frank.

"No, sir," replied Jeffs, "but we expect our case to-morrow."

"I think your to-morrow never arrives—at any rate, your case doesn't arrive with it. Is your case a pleasing fiction, or a reality?"

"It will be here to-morrow, sir, I have no doubt. In fact, I expected it yesterday."

"Well, then, send me up Paul de Kock the instant you get it; will you?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Come along, Cis, my boy."

"You are quite a *grand seigneur*, I perceive, Frank," said Cecil, as they strolled out of the shop. "Cab, tiger, chains, French novels—have you come into an inheritance?"

"Something like it—but jump into my cab, and I'll tell you all about it."

They got in, and Frank, handling the reins with no small degree of pride, drove into the Park, and thus explained his present fortune:

"The fact is, Cis, I have discovered the true method of playing. I broke the bank at No. 14, last Saturday, and have won no trifle since. You see, all the martingales yet invented have some inherent imperfection. They go smoothly enough in theory, but damn the practice, say I."

"Is not yours a martingale, then?"

"No: it is simply playing with skill. To explain it in a few words: you know that there are constantly runs upon a color; sometimes it is the red, sometimes the black. You also know that they dodge about, and that the red will alternately win and lose every successive coup. My plan is to wait quietly while the game is dodging, and directly I see a run, I back in heavily. If the red has turned up three times, the chances are, that there is to be a run on that color, and I back it till it loses. D'ye understand?"

"Perfectly; but I don't so clearly see how you must win at it."

"Bah—*that's* the very best proof! In every martingale, don't you, on the contrary, clearly see how you *must* win, but does that prevent your losing when you begin to play? So, you may not see how I *must* win, but I see how I *do* win—that's enough for me."

They dined together that day, and Frank, who had a box at Drury Lane, proposed that Cecil should accompany him, but Cecil was too unwell, and went home brooding on his friend's prosperity, and playing imaginary games with fantastic success.

All the next day he was moody and irritable. He would not even notice his child, but walked up and down his small room, or sat with his feet on the fender, cowering over the fire, his head buried in his hands.

Toward evening, he wrote to Captain Heath a hypocritical letter, the object of which was, as may be expected, to extract a few pounds from him. He was less moody after sending this off; but Blanche observed a strange wandering in his thoughts.

On the morrow he received a cold, firm answer from the captain, who stated that he had already advanced as much money on the picture as he could afford to pay for it, and that he was therefore forced to refuse.

"Damn him!" Cecil muttered, as he read the letter, and crumpled it between his fingers.

Blanche guessed the contents by that action; but she made no remark.

For at least an hour did he sit looking fixedly on the ground, keeping the crumpled letter in his closed hand; and then she saw him slowly open it, smooth the paper, and examine it attentively. While she was thus watching his countenance, curious as to what could be his motive for examining so minutely a handwriting he knew, he suddenly looked up at her. A strange expression distorted his face, as he shouted—

"What the devil are you looking at me for?"

"I—I—Cecil—"

"You don't suspect any thing, do you?" he fiercely asked.

"Suspect, Cecil; and what?"

"What's that to you?" he said brusquely, and again turned away his head.

She began to fear that he was getting insane.

"Are you not well, dearest?"

"No."

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing. Don't bother me! It must be near dinner, is it not?"

"Yes. Are you hungry?"

"Very; go and see about it."

She left the room.

A few minutes afterward, he was seated at the table, with Captain Heath's letter before him, carefully copying the writing, and comparing his copy with the original. He smiled grimly at his own success; and after several further trials, he forged a check for eighty pounds, which he had just folded and thrust into his waistcoat pocket, when Blanche returned with the dinner.

His agitation, and the eager manner with which he caught up some scraps of paper, and threw them into the fire, did not escape her.

He sat down to dinner, but he could not swallow a morsel; and his hand shook so, that he dared not venture to raise it to his mouth.

"You are ill, dearest," she said. "I am sure you are."

"Pooh! it's want of exercise. I will take a walk."

"Do not go out such weather as this; see how fast the snow falls."

"It won't hurt me. I must go out."

She dared not further interpose; and in a few minutes he was gone.

Left alone, she meditated on the singular change in his manner—on his fierceness when he had observed her watching him—his paleness—his agitation—and his throwing those pieces of paper into the fire.

She opened his writing-case. There, among some loose pieces of blank paper, she found one with some writing on it. A film overspread her eyes, as she recognized in it a copy of Captain Heath's writing—so like it, that had not the characters been traced on a stray slip of paper, she could never have suspected it to be other than his writing.

Rushing upon her like an overwhelming tide, came the swift and terrible thoughts which revealed that her husband had committed a forgery. In the desperate hope that she might not yet be too late to save him from the last act—

that she might yet meet him at the banker's and save him—she threw a shawl around her, put on her bonnet, and in an instant she was in a cab, driving furiously to Charing Cross; in her anxiety too much excited to feel the horror of her situation.

As the cab dashed round the corner, by Charles the First's statue, she saw Cecil hurry from Messrs. Drummonds' banking-house. She saw no more: her brain swam round. When the driver opened the cab-door, he found her in a swoon.

It did not last long: she recovered herself; and wildly looking round her, remembered in an instant all that had passed.

"To South Audley-street!" she impatiently exclaimed.

To Captain Heath's she drove, and astonished the servant very much by hurrying up-stairs, and rushing into the room as if life and death depended on her speed.

"Good God, Blanche! what is this?" he exclaimed, as the half-lifeless woman threw herself speechless into his arms.

It was a long time before she could speak; and even then, in such incoherent sentences, that it was with difficulty Heath understood what she meant to tell him; but he found that it was something terrible, and about Cecil; and he redoubled his attention, trying to piece together into a coherent narrative, the broken utterances of this wretched wife.

At last he understood her, and tears of deep compassion stood in his eyes as he said—

"Cheer up, dear Blanche, cheer up! It is not so bad after all. You terrified me at first. He has only drawn on me in anticipation. You know I still owe him money for the picture—he has paid himself—he was doubtless close pressed."

"But," she sobbed, "he has forged."

"He has been irregular, that is all; he should have warned me of it. However, now you have told me, it is all safe. Quiet yourself."

"Oh, that I should have lived for this!"

"Courage, courage."

"Dishonored! My Cecil dishonored!"

"Not yet, Blanche. He has been imprudent, that is all—imprudent."

"Dishonored!" she exclaimed, distractedly.

"Do you not see, that now I am informed of what has passed, I shall be on my guard? He has been imprudent; no one knows it but ourselves. You can gently point out to him the imprudence—and he is saved. Only yesterday I heard of a situation for him in the Colonies—an excellent place. Away from England, he will have broken from his present connection, and lose his unfortunate habits. A new sphere will call forth fresh energy. He may be saved yet, Blanche; only take courage."

She took his hand, and kissed it in mute thankfulness, but her sobs still tore her bosom, and all his persuasion could not calm her.

Now that she felt the great danger was past, she had time to feel the immensity of the blow—she could grieve.

Heath allowed her to weep without trying to soothe her; for he saw that the great crisis was over; and silently compassionating the sorrow of this broken-hearted creature, to dry whose eyes he would have sold the world, he sat by her side, holding her hand, from time to time replying to its convulsive pressure.

She rose at last to go home. He accompanied her to the door—saw her take Rose Blanche from the servant girl, and cover her with frantic kisses; and then departed, sad and thoughtful, to his own solitary home.

He could not, in his sympathy with her, forbear picturing to himself the contrast of what her fate would have been had she married him instead of Cecil; nor could he refrain from bitterly commenting on the truth of his own prophecies that Cecil would make her unhappy. No lover ever believes that his beloved can possibly be happy with his rival; but Heath had too clearly read Cecil's character, not to feel assured that, rivalry out of the question, Blanche was badly matched in wedding one so weak and selfish.

CHAPTER IX.

RUIN.

In one of the low gambling-houses in Leicester-square, Cecil sat, as in a dream, risking the fruits of his crime. His brain whirled round, and his heart beat every time the door opened, for he could not drive away the fear that his forgery had been detected, and that they were coming to arrest him.

He had dishonored himself to play this new game which Frank had explained to him, and now that the crime was committed, he could not profit by it!

Such a game required, above all others, consummate coolness and self-mastery; Cecil was more agitated, his brain was more confused than ever it had been, and he played utterly at random. It would be difficult to conceive greater torture than that which he endured, for he won without satisfaction, and lost with agony; his brain was not so confused but that he had a distinct perception of his situation, and of the necessity for playing every *coup* as if for life; but at the same time his brain was so drugged with horror and despair, that his will seemed paralyzed, and he was forced, as by an unseen hand, into the ruin which he saw yawning before him.

While the cards were dealt with mechanical precision by the impassive dealer, and Cecil's crime-furnished gold was passing away before his eyes, visions of his happy youth, of his early days of marriage, and healthy activity, floated before his mind; and he, the gambler, on the edge of that dark gulf which gaped before him, turned back his thoughts to those sunny days when his soul was stainless, and his life was full of love and hope, of activity and happiness; it was like a small wild-flower on a mass of loosening rock, which the next gust of wind will quite unloosen, and tumble thundering into the ravine.

He thought of his mother, and of her dying injunctions, and her words of blessing fell upon his ear, just as the dealer, in his passionless voice, proclaimed—

"Black wins."

And a heap of gold was swept away before him.

For hours did this tortured gamester play, becoming gradually inured to the pain he suffered, and deadened to the whispers of his conscience.

It was now eleven o'clock. The room was full of players. A succession of new faces replaced those who one by one fell off, contented with their winnings, or, and this was by far the most frequent case, desperate from their losses. But Cecil never moved. He called for wine occasionally, but nothing interrupted his play.

His last three sovereigns were staked upon the black: his life was on the hazard of that one deal. Even the old players, accustomed to every species of intense emotion, could not keep their eyes off Cecil, as, with parted lips, straining eyes, and purple face, he watched the rapid progress of the game. Intensely they felt the moment was supreme.

He lost!

With a burst of uncontrollable despair, he snatched the rake from the hand of the croupier, who had just swept away his money, and with both hands snapped it in two; a murmur followed this act of violence, which only seemed preparatory to something worse: but he glared round upon the players with such a look of mad fury, that they were awe-stricken.

Instead of any further violence, however, he broke out into a wild, hysterical laugh, which made their blood run cold, and staggered out of the house.

In that moment which had preceded his wild laugh, a vision of his young wife and child destitute—starving—thinned with want and sickness, had appeared to him, and, as in a flash, revealed to him the hideous extent of his ruin.

Beggared, dishonored, stained with a profitless crime, naught remained for him but death; and in death he resolved to still the throbbing of his agony.

As he stumbled into Leicester-square, he ran up against one of those unfortunate women, who, flaunting in satin and faded frippery, make the streets hideous after sunset.

"Now, then, my dear, are you going to rush into my arms without an invitation?

'Was ever woman in this humor wooed?
Was ever woman in this humor won?'"

The fumes of bad wine poisoned the breath of the speaker, but the tones struck so strangely upon Cecil's ears, that they arrested him even in the path of death.

He seized her by the wrist, and dragged her under a lamp-post. As the light fell upon both their faces, and he recognized in the wretched woman arrayed in the garb of shame, the Hester Mason whom he had known so prosperous and ambitious—and she recognized, in the emaciated, haggard wreck before her, the only man she had ever loved, he gasped with inexpressible emotion, she wept with intense shame.

Not a word passed between them. With a suffocating sense of bitter humiliation she wrested herself from his grasp, and darted down Cranbourne-alley. He put his hand to his brow, as if to repress its throbbing, and slowly walked on.

CHAPTER X.

THE SINNER THAT REPENTETH.

The cause of Hester's degradation was one which always has, and one fears always will, people our streets with those unhappy women, whom the law refuses either to acknowledge or to suppress—refuses either to protect or to punish: a lasting stigma upon our civilization!

When Sir Chetsom Chetsom was killed, she had to look about her for means of subsistence; and at first imagined that literature would be an ample field.

Thanks to the diffusion of knowledge, and to the increasing taste for reading, it is now very possible for man or woman to earn a decent and honorable livelihood by the pen; but if possible, it is not easy, and is always, with the best of talents, eminently precarious. For a woman still more so than for a man. Above all, the woman must have good friends, must be "respectable," and fortunate.

Hester had no good friends; she had many acquaintances, but no one who interested himself in her success, no one, at any rate, who both could and would assist her. Moreover, she was not "respectable;" and what was the consequence? dissolute editors were afraid of her contributions "on the score of morals."

To be brief, Hester struggled in vain to get employment; and in great danger of starving, she determined to go back to Walton. Her father consented to receive his unhappy child, and promised that by-gones should be by-gones.

She had better have taken a situation as servant of all-work in a lodging-house, than have returned to her home after what had occurred. She found her father, indeed, glad enough to receive her, and willing enough to forgive the past, on condition of not absolutely *forgetting* it: from time to time he could not refrain from "throwing it in her teeth," when he was at a loss for an argument or an invective.

This is always the case when a fallen daughter returns home, or when she commits *the* one unpardonable fault, and stays at home: her parents, her brothers, and sisters—oh! especially the sisters—never forget that fault. It is held over her head *in terrorem*. It is an ever-present warning and illustration. Bridling up in *their* unshaken chastity—too often unshaken because untempted—the sisters make her feel in a hundred ways, that her fault is unpardoned and unpardonable. Exasperated by this incessant and unjust retribution for a fault which the girl feels deserves more pity, she is at last driven from home and takes refuge in the streets, because her virtuous family can not forget!

It has been often remarked that women are more pitiless toward each other, on that very point where common sympathy should make them most tolerant; and little do they know the extent of the mischief their intolerance creates.

Hester had not to suffer from the sneers and allusions of chaste and offended sisters, but she had to endure worse—the sneers and slights of the whole offended town. The reader remembers how Walton was scandalized at her

flirtation, how shocked at her flight: let him then imagine the howl of outraged purity which saluted her repentant return! *She*, indeed, come back to a town she had disgraced! *She* to show herself among the daughters of respectable people! *She* to be allowed to wallow in corruption, and then as soon as she found that course led to no good, to return again to her home as if nothing had occurred! The minx!

Mrs. Ruddles hoped her husband would take notice of it from the pulpit: such an example as it was to other girls!

Mrs. Spedley expected to see many imitations of such conduct; it was such a premium on vice!

The post-mistress hoped she was as charitable as most people, but she knew what was due to herself, and as long as that *creature* remained in Walton, she, the post-mistress, could not think of purchasing any thing at her father's shop.

Nor, for that matter, could Mrs. Spedley.

Mrs. Ruddles had never for an instant thought of such a thing. It would be a positive encouragement. Mrs. Ruddles herself had daughters. She knew something, she thought, of what constituted a well-regulated mind. She had no fears for her Arabella, Mary, and Martha Jane; but Mrs. Ruddles knew the ill effects of example.

When Hester appeared in the street, all the women instantly crossed to the other side. If she went into a shop to make a purchase, the shop immediately became empty. Women avoided her as if she were a walking pestilence.

En revanche the men ogled her with effrontery, and even middle aged rotundities with large families, gave themselves killing airs when in her presence.

The stupid ignorance of men! I declare the older I grow the more amazed I am at the dull, purblind, inexcusable ignorance in which one-half of the human race seems destined to remain with respect to the other half, in spite of all experience. To meet with a man who has not some gross prejudice, founded on the most blundering misconception with regard to the nature of women, and on that point, too, which one would imagine they would best understand, is really one of the rarest occurrences. The vast majority of men never seem to escape from the ideas they form about women at school; and no contradiction in the shape of experience seems to suggest to them that those ideas are essentially false. To hear men—and men of the world, too—talk about women, is to hear the strangest absurdities and platitudes you can listen to on any subject; to be let into the secret of their conduct toward women, is only to see the ludicrous results to which such erroneous opinions lead them.

It is a tempting subject, but I am not going to pursue this diatribe. I have an illustration to give instead.

Hester Mason having committed a *faux pas*, was instantly, and from that very cause, looked upon by all the men, young and old, as a woman "to be had for the asking." In their simplicity they could admit of no gradations between a Lucretia and Messalina. If a woman were not as chaste as ice, she must necessarily be utterly abandoned. If one man had succeeded in overcoming her scruples, of course another might. The dolts!

Perhaps it is owing to our prudery, which keeps so strict a surveillance over every word and act, that the smallest license seems to imply the extremity of licentiousness!

The school-boy notion of the facility of women was at the bottom of their minds, and with beautiful simplicity some of the "knowing dogs" commenced the attack upon Hester's virtue, without even thinking it necessary to adopt a semblance of respect and attachment.

Certainly Hester was not a woman, under any circumstances, to have admitted the addresses of these men; but now, the undisguised insolence and fatuity of their approaches not only made her cheek burn with shame, but made her heart sick with disgust.

With scorn and withering sarcasm she discomfited them one after the other. The contemptible fools instantly joined the chorus of the women; and with good proof that at any rate she was not entirely abandoned, they were unanimous in their execration of her infamy.

If women were not purer, stronger, and honester than the dull and coarse imaginations of most men depict them, what a world this would be! what children would these women bring forth!

Those men who have known women, known how great their influence for good and for evil, known what a well of feeling, of pure, spontaneous nature, untarnished by contact with the world, there lies hidden in a woman's breast; those who have known how this nature has molded their own minds, refined their coarseness, giving beauty to their strength, will exclaim with me—What a world this would be were women what men generally suppose them!

Here is Hester Mason, certainly not a good specimen of her sex; vain, capricious, willful, sensual, perverted by sounding sophisms respecting the rights of women, and the injustice of the marriage laws; she acts up to her opinions, and throws herself away upon a rich and titled noodle for the sake of furthering her ambitious projects; she finds out her mistake, returns home repentant, and instantly a number of ill-conditioned, coarse-minded, coarse-mannered men imagine she can not hesitate to stoop to them! Believing that she acted from unrestrained licentiousness, they interpreted one act in this school-boy fashion, and hoped to profit by her weakness. But they found out their mistake; or rather never found it out, for they attributed her refusal to viler motives than those to which they would have attributed her consent.

The insults of their proposals struck deep into her heart—deeper far than the scorn of her own sex; and it made her so wretched that, at last, it drove her once more from her home. Yes; home became insupportable, and in a moment of desperation she fled; fled to London, and there endeavored to seek oblivion in the turbulent vortex of a career which one shudders to contemplate.

Of all the tortures, of all the humiliations to which she had submitted, none equaled that of meeting Cecil. In her strange, unhappy life,

there had been but one short dream, and that was her love for Cecil; even when he had rejected her love, and humiliated her by his rejection, she still felt toward him something of that elevating, purifying attachment which forms a sort of serene heaven smiling upon the most abject condition—which is, as it were, the ideal region where the purest, brightest thoughts take refuge. And to meet him in the streets—to appear before his eyes in the flaunting finery of disgrace—to let him see the abyss into which she had fallen! Poor girl! if her errors had no other expiation than that, bitterly would she have expiated them.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WIFE AWAITING HER HUSBAND.

While the wretched girl wandered distractedly on her way, goaded by the pangs of shame and remorse, the still more wretched Cecil, calm in his concentrated despair, was walking along the river side, pursued by the Eumenides, eager to reach a quiet spot where he might end his blighted existence.

The snow fell in large flakes that cold January night; and as each flake sank gently on the quiet bosom of the river, and silently disappeared in it, leaving no other trace than the smallest possible circle, it seemed to him an image of his own disappearance from this stormy, sunless world. In the deep, quiet bosom of eternity was he about to vanish; from this scene of turmoil and disgrace, he was to drop into the swiftly-flowing river of eternity, in it to be absorbed like to those flakes of snow. There was comfort in that thought.

He walked on, thinking of what his wife and child would do when left by him. He thought sadly of Blanche's misery; for he knew the depth of her affection for him—for him who had so ill repaid it, who had brought such shame and sorrow on her head; but he endeavored to console himself with the reflection that her father would take care of her, and that, perhaps, the best thing that could occur to her was to become a widow.

In those lucid moments which precede the last solemn act, he reviewed his conduct with melancholy clearness; and, undimmed by sophisms, his conduct appeared to him in its true light.

He grew calmer as he walked. He thought of his child with something like satisfaction, when he reflected that she was too young to know any thing of her father's disgrace; and that before she grew old enough even to prattle about him, all would be forgotten.

Then he thought of Hester, in her miserable finery, and followed her in imagination through the rapid stages of her inevitable career.

And he thought of Frank, then so prosperous, but soon, as he foresaw, to be dragged down from his prosperity to the destitution which must quickly follow; and he saw him dying in an hospital.

And the thought of death was sweeter to him as he walked musingly on.

A light was dimly shining in Blanche's bedroom, and she was seated by the window looking out into the night, awaiting the return of him who was to return no more. Her child was sleeping calmly; no hint of the anguish which ploughed the hearts of its parents troubled its quiet breathing.

The clock struck twelve.

A heavy sigh issued from the watcher as the strokes fell upon her ear, and she rose to snuff the enormous wick of the neglected candle. She then resumed her seat at the window.

"When will he come?" she asked herself, sadly.

She feared to meet him—feared to look upon his face, after what had passed; feared lest he, upon whose brow she had been wont to see the imperial stamp of genius—in whose eye the luster of a glorious mind, on whose lips the smile of unutterable tenderness—there should now be legible the stamp of infamy, the dull look of shame, the cynical sneer of recklessness.

She feared to meet him, yet she could not repress her impatience to see him; a vague dread that he might not return, shifted to and fro before her mind, and kept her anxiously watching.

The clock struck one.

Her candle was guttering in the socket, and she lighted another. She bent over the cradle of her sleeping infant with a searching look of love; and seeing that she slept peacefully, she again resumed her seat at the window.

The snow had ceased to fall. The bright stars were lustrous in the deep, dark, moonless heavens, in which they seemed suspended. The ground was white with the untrodden snow, as also were the tops of the houses, and the branches of the trees. Not a breath of wind stirred. All was silent without, hushed in the repose of night. Not a footstep was heard; not even the distant barking of some watchful dog.

Cold, cheerless, desolate as a leafless tree, was the night out into which the watcher looked, awaiting her husband's return; but he came not, would not come!

The clock struck two!

The watcher stirred the fire, and drew the shawl closer around her. She was cold; but it was not the cold of that winter night which numbed her limbs, it was the cold, icy fear which momently assumed a more definite and consistent shape.

She no longer asked, "When will he come?"

Her teeth chattered as the thought that he would never come, grew more and more like a certainty.

There was a shroud upon the earth—a pure, white, stainless shroud, prepared for one who was yet young, but who had lived too long.

To her widowed eyes, this garment of snow which nature wore, became a terrible symbol, and the stars seemed to look down upon her in infinite compassion.

He came not; could not come. The silent river had opened to receive him, and was now flowing swiftly and silently over his lifeless corpse.

The clock struck three.

A cry of agony broke from the watcher as those three small strokes with horrible distinctness fell upon her ear, and seemed to utter—

"He is dead!"

But she remained at her window, looking out into the night. For two hours longer did she sit there, and then dropped into a feverish sleep, visited by happy, though broken dreams.

She dreamed that she had dreamed her husband had committed a forgery, and that she awoke to find it but a dream: how great her joy, as she clasped him by the hand, and told him all! and how his tender eyes bent down upon her as he said—

"What! think that of *me!*"

And she awoke—awoke to find herself seated at the window—the dull winter morning struggling into obscure day—the snow heaped up on the window-ledge, and covering every thing without—and the crushing reality was once more threatening her!

CHAPTER XII.

THE GAMBLER'S END.

Set down, set down that sorrow, 'tis all mine.

DECKAR.

HER candle was burned out; the fire had only a few live embers, which went out directly she attempted to revive it. She was numbed with cold; weary with grief; and threw herself upon the bed.

Sleep was impossible. A settled though vague conviction, that Cecil would not return, had taken possession of her mind. She fancied that he must have lost the money, and was now lying concealed for fear of the consequences of his crime.

As the morning fairly broke, she put on her things, and hurried to Captain Heath, to ask his assistance and advice. He was at breakfast when she arrived, and her appearance, so wan, and yet so strangely, supernaturally calm, made him fear the worst.

"Cecil has not returned," she said, quietly. "What is to be done?"

The captain at once guessed the truth, and was silent.

"He is ashamed to return," she said. "How are we to learn where he is?"

He remained silent.

"If we were to advertise in the papers," she suggested, "could we not by that means let him know that his—imprudence—has been overlooked?"

"Yes, yes. That is our only plan."

"Will you do it?"

"At once; but you go home, he may return any minute."

"You think, then, he will return?" she asked, with more emotion in her voice than she had hitherto betrayed.

He trembled slightly, as he answered—

"At any rate—you had better be there."

She pressed his hand mournfully, and withdrew, leaving Heath amazed and alarmed at the quietude of her manner.

On reaching Hammersmith she saw at some distance before her a large crowd of people hurrying along. She quietly wondered what it could be; perhaps a fire; perhaps a man led to the station-house; perhaps a show, which the crowd followed, wondering.

She walked on, till she saw the crowd stop at her own door, and then she flew, urged on by some quick, sudden fear—she pierced the crowd—she entered the house—in the passage were four men bearing a corpse on a shutter: her heart told her whose corpse it was, before her eyes had recognized it.

She saw no more.

When next she became conscious, she found herself in her old bed-room, at her father's, her sister Violet seated by her bed-side, gazing intently upon her. The fever was subsiding, and her life was saved.

CHAPTER XIII.

EXPLANATION.

"Mrs. Dombey, it is very necessary that there should be some understanding arrived at between us. Your conduct does not please me, madam .... I have made you my wife. You bear my name. You are associated with my position and my reputation."

CHARLES DICKENS.

ON the day on which Cecil had forged the check, Meredith Vyner entered his wife's boudoir, with the intention of coming to a serious explanation with her.

Several times, lately, had the word "separation" been pronounced between them, without, however, her attaching much importance to it. She knew that he was miserable; she knew that his love for her had been worn away, but she knew also that he was weak, and thought he would never have courage enough to proceed to extremities.

In this she made a great mistake. Vyner was weak, it is true, but he was also obstinate; he was easily cajoled, but not easily driven from any plan he had once resolved on. Unable to resist the wildest caprices of his wife, while he loved her, she lost all power over him in losing his affection. This she did not suspect. Like many other people, she altogether miscalculated the nature of her power over him, and imagined that what she really gained by cajolery and pretended affection, she gained by mere cunning and strength of will.

Their relative positions were altogether changed. Vyner, no longer the doating husband, was now the obstinate man. He saw that it was impossible to live happily with her, and saw that if his children were once more around him—if Violet especially were once more at home—he could again resume his peaceful routine of existence.

"I am come to speak seriously to you," he said, as, seating himself opposite to her, he drew out his deliberative snuff-box.

"And I am in no humor for it," she replied, "my head aches. My nerves are irritable this morning."

"What I have to say must be said, and the sooner it is said the better for both of us."

She was surprised at the firmness of his manner.

"It is on the old subject," he added; "I need not recapitulate the many strong objections your conduct this last year has given rise to, but I wish, once for all, to understand whether you will pay a little more attention to what is due both to me and yourself."

"How tiresome you are on that subject! When will you understand that a young woman

can not have an old head upon her shoulders, unless it is also an ugly one? I shall be grave and sedate enough in time, I dare say; meanwhile, allow me to observe, that although I may be fond of admiration, yet I know perfectly well what is due to myself."

"If you know it, you do not demean yourself in consequence."

"That is the question. I maintain that I do; and I suppose I am old enough to know what is right on such matters."

He shook his head.

"Can you name any one instance in which I have overstepped the limits to which even English rigidity confines a young woman?"

"Your encouragement of the attentions of Mr. Ashley—"

"Again, Mr. Ashley!"

"Of Mr. Maxwell—"

She burst out laughing; but the laugh was hollow.

"Of Lord * * * *, who every day—"

"Why he's as old as you are!"

Vyner winced at the epigram, which indeed was cruel and insulting.

"It is a pity you did not think of the great disparity in our ages before you married me, Mrs. Vyner."

"A great pity."

"I have often thought so of late."

"How much better had you thought so before you made me an offer!"

"It was the greatest mistake I ever made, but—

> Sic visum Veneri, cui placeat impares
> Formas atque animos sub juga aënea
> Sævo mittere cum joco!"

Vyner had always made that quotation to himself, and now launched it with great satisfaction, as was evident by the noisy pinch of snuff with which he closed it.

Mrs. Vyner shrugged her shoulders.

"You have spoken," he said, "of incompatibilities, and I fear they exist. But, Mrs. Vyner, if you have destroyed my domestic happiness, you shall not destroy my future comfort. I will not be made a laughing-stock abroad, and be made miserable at home. I say I will not. I am come, therefore, to offer you an alternative."

"Let me hear it."

"You must cease to see Mr. Maxwell and Lord * * * *."

"Impossible!"

"I say you must. Moreover, you must change your manner entirely, both to other men and to your husband."

"What manner am I to adopt?"

"That which befits a well-conducted wife."

"Mr. Vyner you are insulting."

"In demanding you to do your duty?"

"No; in asserting that I do anything derogatory."

"You have strange ideas on that point."

"Perhaps so; but they are mine."

"They are not mine, however."

"That is unfortunate!"

"Very. I am demanding nothing extraordinary, I imagine, in insisting that you should cease to flirt with others, and should pay more respect and deference to my wishes than you have done of late. I do not demand affection—"

She again shrugged her shoulders; he perceived it.

"Because," he continued, "I know that is absurd; whatever regard you may once have had for me is gone. I do not even demand gratitude for the kindness I have ever shown you—and you must admit that I have been an indulgent husband—foolishly so. But I have a right to demand from a wife a fulfillment at least of the most ordinary duties of a wife, and a certain amount of respect, or the show of it, at any rate. This I have a right to demand, and this I will have."

Mrs. Vyner was not a woman to brook such a dictatorial tone even from the man she loved; and we have seen how Maxwell, when he adopted it, only irritated her to an unusual degree; from Vyner, whom she had been accustomed to sway as she pleased; from Vyner whom she disliked, and somewhat despised, this tone was, therefore, excessively offensive.

Her lip quivered as she replied, "This is a subject upon which we can never agree. I hold myself to be quite competent to judge of my own actions, and until I have done any thing to forfeit the good opinion of the world, I shall continue to act as I think proper."

"That is your final determination?"

"It is. I hope it will be unnecessary for me to repeat it."

"In coming here I expected this, so I came prepared."

"Let me hear your alternative."

"A separation."

She started; not at the word—that she had heard before—but at the quiet, dogged resolution of the tone. A flush of angry pride ran over her cheeks and brow.

"It is very terrible, your alternative!" she said, ironically.

"Are you prepared to accept it?"

"Perfectly."

"Very well, then, in that case I have only to see about the settlements, and in a week or two, at the farthest, the affair can be arranged."

He put back his snuff-box into his huge pocket, as he said this, and walked out of the room with a calmness that lent dignity to his lumpish figure.

She dropped her head upon her hand, and reflected. Revolted pride, anger, and fear were struggling in her breast. Irritated as she was by her husband's manner, she could not reflect upon the separation without uneasiness.

As his wife, she had an enviable position; separated from him she not only lost the advantages of that position, in a deprivation of wealth, but also in a deprivation of the consideration with which the world regarded her. A woman separated from her husband is always equivocally placed; even when the husband is notorious as a bad character, as a man of unendurable temper, or bitten with some disgraceful vice, society always looks obliquely at the woman separated from him; and when she has no such glaring excuse, her position is more than equivocal. "Respectable" women will not receive her; or do so with a certain *nuance* of reluctance. Men gossip about her, and regard her as a fair mark for their gallantries.

Mrs. Vyner knew all this thoroughly; *she*

had refused to know women in that condition; at Mrs. Langley Turner's where she had more than once encountered these black sheep, she had turned aside her head, and by a thousand little impertinent airs made them feel the difference between her purity and their disgrace. A separation, therefore, was not a thing to be lightly thought of; yet the idea of obeying Vyner, of accepting his conditions, made her cheek burn with indignation.

Absorbed in thought she sat, weighing, as in a delicate balance, the conflicting considerations which arose within her, and ever and anon asking herself,—"What has become of Maxwell?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ALTERNATIVE.

Maxwell had just recovered from the effect of that broken blood-vessel which terminated the paroxysm of passion Mrs. Vyner's language and conduct had thrown him into.

At the very moment when she was asking herself, "What has become of Maxwell?" he concluded his will, arranged all his papers, burned many letters, and, going to a drawer, took from them a pair of pocket pistols with double barrels.

He was very pale, and his veins seemed injected with bile in lieu of blood; but he was excessively calm.

In one so violent, in whose anger was something more like madness than any normal condition of the human mind, who from childhood upward had been unrestrained in the indulgence of his passions, this calmness was appalling.

He loaded the four barrels with extreme precision, having previously cleared the touchholes, and not only affixed the caps with care, but also took the precaution of putting some extra caps in his waistcoat pocket in case of accidents.

His hand did not tremble once; on his brow there was no scowl; on his colorless lips no grim smile; but calm, as if he were about the most indifferent act of his life, and breathing regularly as if no unusual thought was in his mind, he finished the priming of those deadly instruments and placed them in his pocket.

Once more did he read over his will; and then having set every thing in order, rang the bell.

"Fetch a cab," he said quietly to the servant who entered.

"Are you going out, sir?" asked the astonished servant.

"Don't you see I am?"

"Yes, sir—only you are but just out of oed—"

"I am quite well enough."

There was no reply possible. The cab was brought. He stepped into it, and drove to Mrs. Vyner's.

Although she was thinking of him at the very moment when he was announced, she started at the sound of his name. His appearance startled her still more. She saw that he could only just have risen from a bed of sickness, and that sickness she knew had been caused by the vehemence of his love for her.

Affectionate as was her greeting, it brought no smile upon his lips, no light into his glazed eyes.

"The hypocrite!" was his mental exclamation.

"Oh! Maxwell, how I have longed to see you," she said; "you left me in anger, and I confess I did not behave well to you; but why have you not been here before? did you not know that I was but too anxious to make it up with you?"

"How should I know that?" he quietly asked.

"How! did you not know my love for you?"

"I did not," he said, perfectly unmoved.

"You did not? Oh, you ungrateful creature! Is that the return I am to meet with? Is it to say *such* things that you are here?"

A slight smile played in his eyes for a moment, but his lips were motionless.

"Come," she said, "you have been angry with me—I have been wrong—let us forget and forgive."

He did not touch her proffered hand, but said—

"If for once in your life you can be frank, be so now."

"I will. What am I to say?"

Carelessly putting both hands into his coat-pockets, and grasping the pistols, he rose, stretched out his coat tails, and stood before her in an attitude usual with him, and characteristic of Englishmen generally, when standing with their backs to the fire.

"You promise to be frank?" he said.

"I do."

"Then tell me whether Lord * * * * was here yesterday."

"He was."

"Will he be here to-morrow?"

"Most likely."

"Then you have not given him his congé?"

"Not I."

Maxwell paused, and looked at her keenly, his right hand grasping firmly the pistol in his pocket.

"Then may I ask the reason of your very civil reception of me to-day?"

"The reason! Civil!"

"Yes, the reason, the *motive*: you must have one."

"Is not my love—"

"You promised to be frank," he said, menacingly.

"I did—I am so."

"Then let us have no subterfuge of language—speak plainly—it will be better for you."

"Maxwell, if you are come here to irritate me with your jealousy, and your absurd doubts, you have chosen a bad time. I am not well. I am not happy. I do not wish to quarrel with you—do not force me to it."

"Beware!" he said, in deep, solemn tones.

"Beware you! George, do not provoke me—pray, do not. Sit down and talk reasonably. What is it you want to ask me?"

"I repeat: the motive for your civility to me?"

"And I repeat: my love."

"Your love!"

"There, again! Why will you torment me with this absurd doubt? Why should you doubt me! Have I any interest in deceiving you? You are not my husband. It is very strange that when I do not scruple to avow my love, you should scruple to believe me."

"My scruples arise from my knowledge of you: you are a coquette."

"I know it; but not to you."

"Solemnly—do you love me?"

"Solemnly—I do!"

He paused again, as unprepared for this dissimulation. She withstood his gaze without flinching.

An idea suddenly occurred to him.

"Mary, after what I have seen, doubts are justifiable. Are you prepared to give me a proof?"

"Yes, any; name it."

"Will you go with me to France?"

"Run away with you?"

"You refuse!" he said, half drawing a pistol from his pocket.

She was bewildered. The suddenness of the proposition, and its tremendous importance staggered her.

A deep gloom concentrated on his face; the crisis had arrived, and he only awaited a word from her to blow her brains out.

With the indescribable rapidity of thought, her mind embraced the whole consequences of his offer—weighed the chances—exposed the peril of her situation with her husband, and permitted her to calculate whether since separation seemed inevitable, there would not be an advantage in accepting Maxwell's offer. "He loves me," she said; "loves me as no one ever loved before. With him I shall be happy."

"I await your decision," he said.

"George, I am yours!"

She flung herself upon his neck. He was so astonished at her resolution, that at first he could not believe it, and his hands still grasped the pistols; but by degrees her embrace convinced him, and clasping her in his arms, he exclaimed—

"Your love has saved you! You shall be a happy woman—I will be your slave!"

CHAPTER XV.

THOSE LEFT TO WEEP.

The discovery of Mrs. Vyner's flight was nearly coincident with the announcement of Cecil's suicide. Poor Vyner was like a madman. He reproached himself for having spoken so harshly to his wife, for having driven her to this desperate act, and thus causing her ruin. Had he been more patient, more tolerant! She was so young, so giddy, so impulsive, he ought to have had more consideration for her!

It was quite clear to Vyner's mind that he had behaved very brutally, and that his wife was an injured innocent.

In the midst of this grief, there came the horrible intelligence of Cecil's end. There again Vyner reproached himself. Why did he allow Blanche to marry that unhappy young man? On second thoughts, "he had never allowed it;" but yet it was he who encouraged Cecil—who invited him to his seat—who pressed him to stay!

In vain did Captain Heath remonstrate with him on this point; Vyner was at that moment in a remorseful, self-reproachful spirit, which no arguments could alter. He left every thing to Captain Heath's management, with the helplessness of weak men, and sat desolate in his study, wringing his hands, taking ounces of snuff, and overwhelming himself with unnecessary reproaches.

Blanche, in a brain fever, was removed to her father's, where she was watched by the miserable old man, as if he had been the cause of her sorrow. Violet was sent for from her uncle's and established herself once more in the house. Now her step-mother was gone, she could devote herself to her father.

Blanche's return to consciousness was unhappily also a return to that fierce sorrow which nothing but time could assuage. She was only induced to live by the reflection that her child needed her care. But what a prospect was it for her! How could she ever smile again! How could she ever cease to weep for her kind, affectionate, erring, but beloved Cecil!

It is the intensity of all passion which makes us think it must be eternal; and it is this very intensity which makes it so short-lived. In a few months Blanche occasionally smiled; her grief began to take less the shape of a thing present, and more that of a thing past; it was less of a sensation, and more of a reverie.

At first the image of her husband was a ghastly image of dishonor and early wreck; his face wore the stern, keen look of suspicion which had agitated her when last she saw him alive; or else it wore the placidity of the corpse which she had last beheld. Behind that ghastly image stood the background of their happy early days of marriage, so shortlived, yet so exquisite!

In time the ghastliness faded away, and round the image of her husband, there was a sort of halo—the background gradually invaded the foreground, till at last the picture had no more melancholy in it than there is in some sweet sunset over a quiet sea. The tears she shed were no longer bitter: they were the sweet and pensive tears shed by that melancholy which finds pleasure in its own indulgence.

Grief had lost its pang. Her mind, familarized with her loss, no longer dwelt upon the painful, but on the beautiful side of the past. Her child was there to keep alive the affectionate remembrance of its father, without suggesting the idea of the moody, irritable, ungenerous husband, which Cecil had at the last become.

Like a child crying itself to sleep—passing from sorrow into quiet breathing—her grief had passed into pensiveness. Cecil's image was as a star smiling down upon her from heaven: round it were clustered quiet, happy thoughts, not the less happy because shadowed with a seriousness which *had been* grief.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VOICE OF PASSION.

VYNER soon recovered from the double shock he had sustained, and was now quite happy again, with his two girls, and his excellent friend Heath, as his constant companions; while Julius and Rose were seldom two days absent from them.

For the sake of Blanche they now returned to Wytton Hall, and there her health was slowly but steadily restored.

Captain Heath was her companion in almost every walk and drive; reading to her the books she wished; daily becoming a greater favorite with little Rose Blanche, who would leave even her nurse to come to him; and daily feeling serener, as his love grew not deeper, but less unquiet: less, as he imagined, like a lover's love, and more like that of an elder brother.

Blanche was happier with him than with any one else; not that she loved him, not even that she divined his love; since Cecil's death, his manner had been even less demonstrative than it had ever been before, and it would have been impossible for the keenest observer to have imagined there was any thing like love in his attentions.

What quiet, blissful months those were which they then passed; Vyner once more absorbed in his Horace; Blanche daily growing stronger, and less melancholy; Heath living as one in a dream; Violet hearing with a woman's pride in him she loves, of Marmaduke's immense success in parliament, where he was already looked up to as the future Chatham or Burke.

Every time Violet saw Marmaduke's name in the papers, her heart fluttered against the bars of its prison, and she groaned at the idea of being separated from him. Indeed her letters to Rose were so full of Marmaduke, that Rose planned with Julius a little scheme to bring the two unexpectedly together, as soon as Violet returned to town.

"I am sure Violet loves him," said Rose; "I don't at all understand what has occurred to separate them. Violet is silent on the point, and is uneasy if I allude to it. But don't you agree with me, Julius, that she must love him?"

"I think it very probable."

"Probable! Why not certain?"

"Because, you know, I am apt to be suspicious on that subject."

"*I* know you are," she said, laughing and shaking her locks at him, "and a pretty judge you are of a woman's heart!"

Julius allowed himself to be persuaded that Violet really did love Marmaduke, and accordingly some weeks afterward, when the Vyners had returned, Julius arranged a pic-nic in which Marmaduke was to join, without Violet's knowledge. Fearful lest she should refuse to accompany them if she saw him before starting, it was agreed that Marmaduke should meet them at Richmond.

Imagine with what feverish impatience he awaited them, and with what a sinking, anxious heart he appeared among them. Violet blushed, and looked at Rose; the laughter in her eyes plainly betrayed her share in the plot, in defiance of the affected gravity of her face. He shook hands with such of the company as he knew personally, was introduced to the others, and then quietly seated himself beside Violet, in a manner so free from either embarrassment or gallantry, that it put her quite at her ease. She had determined, from the first, to frustrate Rose's kindly-intentioned scheme; and she felt that she had strength enough to do so. But his manner at once convinced her that, however he might have been brought there, it was with no intention of taking any advantage of their meeting to open forbidden subjects.

Marmaduke was in high spirits, and talked quite brilliantly. Violet was silent; but from time to time, as he turned to address a remark to her, he saw her look of admiration, and that inspired him.

I need not describe the pic-nic, for time presses, and pic-nics are all very much alike. Enough, if we know that the day was spent merrily and noisily, and that dinner was noisier and merrier than all: the champagne drank, amounting to something incredible.

Evening was drawing in. The last rays of a magnificent sunset were fading in the western sky, and the cool breeze springing up warned the company that it was time to prepare for their return.

The boisterous gayety of the afternoon and dinner had ceased. Every one knows the effect of an exhilarating feast, followed by a listless, exhausted hour or two; when the excitement produced by wine and laughter has passed away, a lassitude succeeds, which in poetical minds induces a tender melancholy, in prosaic minds a desire for stimulus or sleep.

As the day went down, all the guests were exhausted, except Marmaduke and Violet, who, while the others were gradually becoming duller and duller, had insensibly wandered away, engrossed in the most enchanting conversation.

"Did I not tell you?" whispered Rose, as she pointed out to Julius the retreating figures of her sister and Marmaduke.

Away the lovers wandered, and although their hearts were full of love, although their eyes were speaking it as eloquently as love can speak, not a syllable crossed their lips which could be referred to it. A vague yearning—a dim, melancholy, o'ermastering feeling held its empire over their souls. The witching twilight, closing in so strange a day, seemed irresistibly to guide their thoughts into that one channel which they had hitherto so dexterously avoided. Her hand was on his arm; he pressed it tenderly, yet gently—so gently!—to his side. He gazed into her large, lustrous eyes, and, intoxicated by their beauty and tenderness, he began to speak.

"It is getting late; we must return—we must separate. Oh! Violet, before we separate, tell me that it is not forever—"

"Marmaduke!" she stammered out, alarmed.

"Dearest, dearest Violet, we shall meet again—you will let me see you—will you not?"

She was silent, struggling.

They walked on a few paces; then he again said—

"You will not banish me entirely—you will from time to time—"

"No, Marmaduke," she said, solemnly; "no, it will not be right. You need not look so pained—I—have I nothing to overcome when I forego the delight of seeing you? But it must not be. You know that it can not be."

"I know nothing of the kind!" he impetuously exclaimed; "I only know that you do not love me!"

She looked reproachfully at him; but his head was turned away.

"Cold, cold as marble," he muttered, as they walked on.

She did not answer him. Lovers are always unreasonable and unjust. He was furious at her "coldness;" she was hurt at his misunderstanding her. She could have implored him to be more generous; but he gave her no encouragement—he spoke no word—kept his look averted. Thus neither tried to explain away the other's misconception; neither smoothed the other's ruffled anger. In silence they walked on, environed by their pride. The longer they kept silent, the bitterer grew their feelings; the more he internally reprobated her for coldness, the more she was hurt at his refusal to acknowledge the justness of her resolution, after all that had passed between them by letter.

In this painful state of feeling, they joined their companions just as the boats were got ready.

Rose looked inquiringly at Violet; but Violet averted her head. Julius was troubled to perceive the evident anger of Marmaduke.

The boats pushed off. The evening was exquisite, and Rose murmured to Julius the words of their favorite Leopardi:—

> Dolce e chiara è la notte, e senza vento,
> E queta sovra i tetti e in mezzo agli orti
> Posa la luna, e di lontan rivela
> Serena ogni montagna.

Wearied by the excitement of the day, they were almost all plunged in reveries from which they made no effort to escape. The regular dip of the oars in the water, and the falling drops shaken from them, had a musical cadence, which fell deliciously on the ear. It was a dreamy scene. The moon rose, and shed her gentle light upon them, as they moved along, in almost unbroken silence, upon the silver stream. The last twitter of the birds had ceased; the regular and soothing sounds of the oars alone kept them in a sort of half consciousness of being awake.

Marmaduke and Violet were suffering tortures. She occasionally stole a glance at him, and with redoubled pain read upon his haughty face the expression of anger and doubt which so much distressed her. The large tears rolled over her face. She leaned over the boat side to hide them, and as she saw the river hurrying on beneath her, she thought of the unhappy Cecil, and of his untimely end. Over his dishonored corpse had this cold river flowed, as gently as now it flowed beneath her. From Cecil her thoughts wandered to Wytton Hall, and her early inclination for him—to her scene in the field with the bull—to her first meeting with Marmaduke; and then she thought no more of Cecil.

Thus they were rowed through the silent evening. On reaching town, the party dispersed.

Marmaduke and Violet separated with cold politeness, and each went home to spend a miserable night.

For some days did Marmaduke brood over her refusal, and as he reflected on the strength of her character, and the slight probability that she would ever yield—her very frankness told him that—he took a sudden and very lover-like resolution that he would quit England, and return to Brazil.

Preparations for his departure were not delayed an instant, and, with his usual impetuosity, he had completed every arrangement before another would have fairly commenced.

Leave-taking began. He wrote to Vyner, announcing his intention, and saying that he proposed doing himself the pleasure of bidding them adieu. He had the faint hope, which was very faint, that Violet might be present, and that he might see her for the last time. Lovers attach a very particular importance to a last farewell, and angry as Marmaduke was with Violet, the idea of quitting England forever, without once more seeing her, was extremely painful to him.

It was a dull, drizzly day—enough to depress the most elastic of temperaments. Violet was in her father's study, looking out upon the mist of rain and cloud, debating with herself whether she should be present during Marmaduke's visit or not.

After what had passed, Violet tried to persuade herself that it was fortunate he was going to quit England, fearing that her resolution would never hold out against his renewed entreaties; but it was in vain she sophisticated with herself—her heart told her that she was wretched, intensely wretched, at his departure.

Her father's voice roused her from this reverie, and she passed into the drawing-room, where, a few minutes afterward, the servant entered, and announced "Mr. Ashley."

A stream of fire seemed suddenly to pour along her veins; but by the time he had shaken hands with Vyner and Blanche, and had turned to her, she was comparatively calm. His face was very sallow, and there was a nervous quivering of his delicate nostrils, which indicated the emotion within, but which was unobserved by her, as her eyes were averted.

The conversation was uneasy and commonplace. Marmaduke's manner was calm and composed, but his voice was low. Violet sat with her eyes upon the carpet, deadly pale, and with colorless lips. Blanche, who did not quite understand the relation between them, but who knew that Violet loved him, was anxious on her account. Vyner alone was glib and easy. He talked of parliament, and remarked that the best thing he knew of it was, that the members always quoted Horace.

As the interview proceeded, Marmaduke's grave, cold manner became slightly tinged with irony and bitterness; and when Vyner said to him, "Apropos, what—if the question be permissible—what induces you to leave us? are you to be away long?"

He replied, with a marked emphasis, "Very long."

"Is Brazil, then, so very attractive?"

"England ceases to be attractive. I want

breathing space. There I can, as Tennyson sings—

'Burst all the links of habit—there to wander far away,
On from island unto island, at the gateways of the day.'"

Blanche, mildly interposing, said—

"But what does he also sing, and in the same poem?

'Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.'"

Violet's eyes were fixed upon the ground.

"And, after all—poetry aside—what are you going to do with yourself in that hot climate?"

"To marry, perhaps," he said, carelessly, and with a forced laugh.

Violet shook all over; but she did not raise her eyes.

"An heiress?" asked Vyner.

"No—to continue Tennyson—

'I will take some savage woman, she shall rear my dusky race.'"

There was singular bitterness, as he added—

"In those climates, the passions are not cramped by the swaddling-clothes of civilization; their franker natures better suit my own impulsiveness: when they love they love—they do not stultify their hearts with intricate sophisms."

Violet now raised her large eyes, and, with mournful steadiness, reproached him by a look for the words he had just uttered. He met her look with one as steady, but flashing with scorn.

"Well, for my part," said Vyner, tapping his snuff-box, "Brazil would have little attraction for me, especially if the women are violent. I can't bear violent women."

Marmaduke had expected some remark from Violet in answer to his speech; but that one look was her only answer, and she was now as intently examining the carpet as before. He noticed her paleness, and the concentrated calmness of her manner, and it irritated him the more.

Blanche, with true feminine sagacity, saw it was desirable, in every case, that Violet should have an opportunity of speaking with him alone, so walked out of the room, and in a few minutes sent the servant with a message to Vyner, that he was wanted for an instant down stairs.

The lovers were now alone, and horribly embarrassed. They wanted to break the uneasy silence, but neither of them could utter a word.

At last Violet, feeling that it was imperative on her to say something, murmured, without looking at him—

"And when do you start?"

"On Monday."

Another pause ensued; perhaps worse this time than before, because of the unsuccessful attempt.

"I wonder whether it still rains?" he said, after a few moments' silence, and walked to the window to look out.

Left thus sitting by herself—an emblem of the far more terrible desertion which was to follow—Violet looked in upon her desolate heart, and felt appalled at the prospect. The imperious cry of passion sounded within her, and would not be gagged: the pent-up tide burst away the barriers, and rushed precipitately onward, carrying before it all scruples, like straws upon a stream.

"Marmaduke!" she exclaimed.

He turned from the window; she had half-risen from her seat; he walked up to her.

She flung herself into his arms.

"Is this true, Violet? Speak—are you mine—mine?"

She pressed him closer to her. It is only men who find words in such moments; and Marmaduke was as eloquent as love and rapture could make him.

When she did speak, it was in a low, fluttering tone, her pale face suffused with blushes, as she told him, that to live apart from him was *impossible*;—either he must stay, or take her with him.

Meanwhile, Vyner had been prettily rated by Blanche for his dullness in not perceiving that the lovers wanted to be alone.

"But are you certain, Blanche, that they are lovers? For my part, I wish it were so; but although Violet certainly has a regard for him, I have reason to believe that he has none for her."

Blanche sighed, and said—

"Then let us go back, for, in that case, they will only be uncomfortable together."

N.B.—The journey to Brazil was indefinitely postponed.

EPILOGUE.

1845.

"Je l'aurais supprimée si j'écrivais un roman ; je sais que l'héroine ne doit avoir qu'un goût ; qu'il doit être pour quelqu'un de parfait et ne jamais finir ; mais le vrai est comme il peut, et n'a de mérite que d'être ce qu'il est."

MADAME DE STAAL DE LAUNAY.

THE moon was serenely shining, one soft July night, exactly ten years from the date of the prologue to this long drama, when a young woman crept stealthily from the door of an old and picturesque-looking house, at the extremity of the town of Angoulême, and with many agitated glances thrown back, as one who feared pursuit, ran, rather than walked, on to the high road.

The moonbeams falling on that pale, wan, terror-stricken face, revealed the scarcely recognizable features of the gay, daring, fascinating girl, whom, ten years before, we saw upon the sands, behind Mrs. Henley's house, parting in such hysterical grief from the lover whom she then thought never could be absent from her heart, and whom, a few months afterward, she jilted for twelve thousand a year. Yes, that pale, wan woman was Mrs. Meredith Vyner ; and she fled from the man for whom she had sacrificed her name !

Her face was a pathetic commentary upon her life. No longer were those tiger eyes lighted up with the fire of daring triumph, no longer were those thin lips curled with a smiling, cruel coquetry, no longer drooped those golden ringlets with a fairy grace. The eyes were dull with grief; the lips were drawn down with constant fretfulness; the whole face sharpened with constant fear and eagerness. Her beauty had vanished—her health was broken—her gayety was gone. Crushed in spirit, she was a houseless fugitive, escaping from the most hateful of tyrants.

Retribution, swift and terrible, had fallen upon her head. From the moment when, in obedience to that wild impulse, she had fled from her husband with her saturnine lover, her life had been one protracted torture. Better, oh ! better far, would it have been for her to have refused him, and to have died by his hand, than to have followed him to such misery as she had endured !

It would take me long to recount in detail the sad experience of the last two years. She found herself linked to a man, whose diabolical temper made her shudder when he frowned, and whose mad, unreasonable, minute jealousy kept her in constant terror. She dared not look at another man. She was never allowed to quit his sight for an instant. If she sighed, it made him angry ; if she wept it drew down reproaches upon her, and insinuations that she repented of the step she had taken, and wished to leave him. A day's peace or happiness with such a man, was impossible. He had none of the amiable qualities which might have made her forget her guilty position. Dark, passionate, suspicious, ungenerous, and exacting, he was always brooding over the difference between the claims he made upon her admiration and love, and the mode in which she responded to those claims. His tyrannous vanity could only have been propitiated by the most abject and exorbitant adulation—adulation in word, look, and act. She had sacrificed herself, but that was only one act, and he demanded a continued sacrifice. No woman had ever loved him before, yet nothing less than idolatry, or the simulation of it, would content him. He could not understand how she should have any other thought than that of ministering to his exacting vanity.

Now, of all woman, Mrs. Vyner was the last to be capable of such a passion ; and certainly, under such circumstances, no woman could have given way to the passion, had she felt it. In constant terror and perpetual remorse, what time had she for the subtleties of love ? She dreaded and despised him. She saw that her fate was inextricably inwoven with his ; and—what a humiliation !—she saw that he did not love her !

No, Maxwell did not love her. She had not been with him a month before he became aware of the fact himself. It is a remark I have often made, that men thwarted in their desires confound their own willfulness with depth of passion. With fierce energy, they will move heaven and earth to gain what, when gained, they disregard. This is usually considered as a proof of the strength of their love ; it only shows the strength of their self-love.

It was Maxwell's irritated vanity which made him so persisting in his pursuit of Mrs. Vyner. It was his wounded vanity which made him capable of murdering her ; not his love : for love, even when wounded, is still a generous feeling ;—it is sympathy, and admits no hate.

What, then, was Maxwell's object in living with Mrs. Vyner, after the discovery that he did not really love her ? Why did he not quit her, or at least allow her to quit him ?

His vanity ! precisely that : the same exacting vanity which prompted all his former actions, prompted this. He felt that she did not idolize him ; he knew she would be glad to quit him, and there was torture in the thought. Had she really loved him with passionate self-oblivion, he would have deserted her. As it was, the same motive which had roused his desire for her possession, which had made him force her to sacrifice every thing for his sake, was as active now as then. If she left him, he was still, except for the one act of her elopement, as far from his goal as before.

It may seem strange that, not loving her, he should prize so highly the demonstrations of affection from her ; but those who have probed the dark and intricate windings of the heart, know the persistency of an unsatisfied desire, and above all, know the tyrannous nature of

vanity. To this must be added the peculiar condition of Maxwell: the condition of a man intensely vain, who had never before been loved, and who had, as it were, staked his existence on subduing this one woman's heart.

What a life was theirs! A life of ceaseless suspicion, and of ceaseless dread—of bitter exasperation, and of keen remorse—of unsatisfied demands, and of baffled hope.

It lasted nearly two years. Then Maxwell, at the conclusion of some brutal quarrel, burst another blood-vessel, and his life was despaired of. Mary was his nurse, he would have no other. She had to sit up with him; to attend upon him; to submit to his petty irritability, made worse by illness; to watch him in his restless slumbers, hoping that each time he closed his eyes would be the last.

One night—it was the very night on which this chapter opened—she sat by his side absorbed in gloomy thought. The candle was flaring in the socket. Every thing was still. The dying man slept peacefully. With her hands drooping upon her lap, she sat, allowing her thoughts to wander; and they wandered into the dim future, when, released from her tyrant, she was once more a happy woman. Long did she indulge in that sweet reverie, and when it ceased, she turned her head mechanically to look upon the sleeper. He was wide awake: his dull eyes were fixed intently upon her; and a shiver ran all over her body as she met that gaze!

"*I am not dead yet!*" he said, as if he had interpreted her thoughts.

She trembled slightly. With a sneer, he closed his eyes again.

Silently she sat by his side communing with her own dark thoughts. He slept again; slept soundly. She rose, and moved about the room; it did not awaken him. She took courage;—crept down stairs, unfastened the door—and fled—

Fled, and left her tyrant dying;—fled, and left him without a human being to attend upon him—left him to die there like a dog; or to recover, if it should chance so. She cared not; her only thought was flight; and, winged with terror, she flew from the accursed home of guilt and wretchedness; and felt her heart beat distractedly, as, a homeless, penniless wanderer, she urged her steps along that dusty road under the quiet, shining moon.

Ten days afterward, Meredith Vyner received a long letter from his wife, detailing the misery of her penniless condition, and imploring pecuniary aid. The poor old man wept bitterly over the letter, and again reproached himself with having been the cause of her ruin. He could not forget that he had loved her—had been happy with her. He forgave her for not having loved one so old as himself; and wrote to her the following reply:—

"Wytton Hall, *2nd August*, 1845

"My Dear Wife,

"We have both need of forgiveness—you have mine. I know I am not young enough to be loved by you:

> Durum! sed levius fit patientia
> Quidquid corrigere est nefas,

as our favorite says—not that the quotation is very good. But if you can have patience, as I can have; if you can forget all 'incompatibilities,' and live quietly and not unhappily with me, come back again, and all shall be forgotten. I will do my best to make you happy. I promise that nothing of what has passed shall ever be recurred to. You shall again be mistress of my house and fortune.

"But I do not wish to *force* you even to this. If, on deliberate reflection, you think you can not live comfortably with me, I have given instructions to Messrs. Barton and Hadley to remit you, wherever you may choose to reside, eight hundred pounds a year. Upon this you can live in all comfort in France. With every wish for your happiness,

"Believe me, my dear wife,

"Yours affectionately,

"H. S. Meredith Vyner."

This letter never reached Mrs. Vyner. Believing that her application had been treated with the silent scorn it deserved, she left the town, and toiled her way to a neighboring town, where a young woman, formerly one of her maids, kept a small *magazin de modes*, and offered a temporary asylum. There she endeavored to earn a subsistence by teaching English; and at first success crowned her efforts; but having been recognized by an English traveler spending a few days there, the fact of her having eloped from her husband became bruited about, and all her pupils left her.

She was forced to quit the place, and to seek refuge and oblivion in Paris. What bitter humiliations, and what severe trials, she had there to undergo may be readily conceived. A mystery hangs over her fate; she was seen once on the *Boulevard du Temple*, miserably dressed, and so aged by suffering, that every trace of beauty had disappeared; but nothing has since been heard of her.

Concerning the other persons of this tale, I have few particulars to add.

Mrs. Langley Turner has married Lord ****, and now gives as many parties as before, only they are fearfully dull: perhaps because so much more "select;" for it is a very serious truth, that your high people are any thing but entertaining.

Frank Forrester has seen many ups and downs; but the last time I saw him, his cab splashed me with mud as I lounged down St. James's-street.

Rose has two chubby children, who promise to have the spirit of their mother; they keep the nursery in a constant uproar!

Violet has one large, dark-eyed, solemn boy, who, though not a twelvemonth old, looks at you with such thoughtful seriousness, that you are puzzled what to say to him; and I refrained tickling him under the chin, lest he should consider it as unseemly trifling; and as to talking to him about his tootsy-pootsies being vezzy pitty—that never could enter the mind even of the most ignorant nurse.

Marmaduke continues his political career with dignity and success; Violet cheering him on, and loving him with all her large heart, so that Rose declares, except herself and Julius, she knows of nobody so happy as these two;—Violet disputes the exception.

And Captain Heath? The narration of his happiness is a *bonne bouche* I have reserved for the last.

The whole family were at Wytton Hall, and though so happy in themselves, frequent were their inquiries as to when the captain was to come down—only one person never asked that question, and that person was Blanche; the reason of her silence I leave to be guessed.

He came at last; came not to see the mild, affectionate greeting of a sister from his much loved Blanche, but the delight, embarrassment, and pain of one who loved and dared not avow it. He had been absent three months. During that absence, she discovered her love. At first, she merely felt a certain weariness; next succeeded melancholy; next, impatience to see him; and finally, the yearning of her heart proclaimed she loved him.

Yes: such is the imperfection of poor human nature, that it can not reach the circulating library standard; with our best efforts to be forlorn and disconsolate, we *will* accept of society and consolation, with the strongest idea of the virtue of constancy, a loving heart must love!

Blanche was embarrassed when she saw her lover again! and he, poor fellow! was too modest to understand her embarrassment. In vain did they ramble about the grounds together—not a syllable did he breathe of his love. Blanche began to be almost fretful.

One morning they were playing with Rose Blanche together, and the little toddler having climbed upon his knee, declared she intended to "mazzy Captain Heath some day;" upon which her mamma said a *leetle* pettishly: "No, my darling, Captain Heath is not a *marrying man*. He is to be an old bachelor."

Captain Heath made no reply, for he could not tell her why he was condemned to be an old bachelor.

Yet, that very afternoon, as they were strolling through the wood together, and the conversation turned upon her child, he was moved by some mysterious impulse to take her hand in his, and with a faltering voice, to say—

"Blanche—dearest Blanche—forgive me for what I am now going to say—refuse the offer, if you will, but do not be offended with me for making it. Your child, Blanche, is growing up. She will soon need a better protector than even your love—she—I hope you will not misunderstand me—I know you can not love me—though I have loved you so many years—but I am grown used to that. I have loved you, Blanche, for years, scarcely ever with the hope of a return, and latterly, with the certainty that my love was hopeless. But when I offer myself as a husband—as a protector to you, and to your child—I do that which, if it would not pain you, I feel to be right. I want to have a husband's authority for devoting my life to you. I do not ask your love—!"

Her head was turned away, and her eyes were filling with tears—tears of exquisite pain, of inexpressible delight; as these words, "I do not ask your love," thrilled through her, she suddenly turned and looked him full in the face.

Was it her blushing tremor, was it her undisguised tenderness which spoke so clearly to the yearning heart of her lover? I know not. Love has a language of its own, untranslatable by any words of ours, and that language, in its mystic, yet unequivocal voice, told Captain Heath, that he was loved.

THE END.

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